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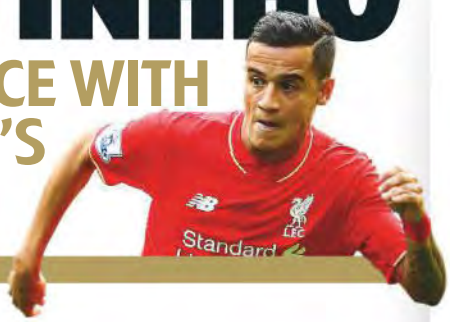

Club focus

FIORENTINA

Purple days in Serie A

Coach profile

GUARDIOLA PEP TALK

The lowdown on football's most wanted boss

Biography

THOMAS MULLER

Bayern superstar in the spotlight

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QATAR... Australia's Jamie MacLaren is restrained as he argues with Vietnam keeper Phil Minh Long during the AFC Under-23 Championship

EL SALVADOR...players from Alianza celebrate in front of their fans after winning the 2015 Apertura Final match

ITALY...Marek Hamsik celebrates scoring for Napoli against Torino

NEW ZEALAND...Dylan Fox of Wellington Phoenix attempts to clear from an airborne Dimitri Petratos of Brisbane Roar

PORTUGAL...Benfica's Jonas Oliveira celebrates with fans after scoring against Rio Ave

ENGLAND...Everton's Gareth Barry, Ross Barkley and Tom Cleverley (left to right) repel a Newcastle United attack

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FROM THE EDITOR

By the time you read this, Pep Guardiola may have announced which club he will be heading for this summer. Or he may not. That's one of the perils of monthly deadlines. But that does not mean we cannot analyse Guardiola's time at Bayern Munich (page 62).

Similarly, the FIFA presidential election, due to take place on February 26, is hard to call and any preview is likely to be rendered out of date by deals between the candidates.

What is undeniable is the paucity of quality candidates in the election. Even the two leading candidates have major flaws. Sheikh Salman remains under pressure from human rights campaigners to explain how he was not involved in the torture and imprisonment of Bahrain footballers. As FA president, he was there but he didn't see anything, he said. Where have we heard that before?

> The FIFA presidential election is hard to call and likely to be affected by deals between the candidates

As for European candidate Gianni Infantino, he is only standing because his boss, Michel Platini, has been banned from all football activity for eight years, the fallout from his falling out with Sepp Blatter.

It means we can concentrate on the football this month, from Guardiola, to Thomas Muller (page 38), Fiorentina (page 46) and plenty more besides.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Real Madrid appoint Zinedine Zidane as coach ..... page 32
2 Pep Guardiola to leave Bayern and work in England ..... page 62
3 Real and Atletico Madrid handed transfer ban ..... page 10
4 Litex kicked out of Bulgarian top flight ..... page 36
5 South Korea loses out to China in Asia's transfer market ..... page 90
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7 Jimmy Hill remembered ..... page 20
8 Tigres on top in Mexico ..... page 92
9 Lyon's new stadium is opened ..... page 28
10 FIFA election ..... page 18

SPAIN

Madrid clubs hit by FIFA transfer ban

Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid have been banned by FIFA from registering new signings in the next two transfer windows as punishment for breaching international regulations on underage players.

Neither club will be able to register any new players until the summer of 2017, although they will still be able to make signings during that time. Atletico were also hit with a fine of CHF900,000 (£622,000) while Real have been fined CHF360,000 (£249,000).

Both clubs plan to appeal against the ban, which is similar to that imposed on Barcelona in April 2014. An appeal enabled Barca to delay the ban, allowing them to sign players in the summer of 2014 before the ban came into effect in the January 2015 and summer 2015 transfer windows.

Barcelona still bought Arda Turan and Aleix Vidal during the period of the ban, although both

"I wanted to pay them, but the Chinese hackers messed with my money"

Rapid Bucharest owner Valerii Moraru explains why his players have not been paid

Madrid mistakes...Real (in white) and Atletico have both received transfer bans

players were prevented from playing for their new club until January 2016.

Real said the claim that they had signed foreign players under the age of 18 without being properly registered was "absolutely untrue".

"Real Madrid will appeal this decision of FIFA in all the sporting incidents, considering them absolutely inappropriate," said the club.

Real director general Jose Angel Sanchez called the ban "absolutely unjustified" and "totally unexpected", saying he had "high hopes" of overturning it on appeal.

New Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane called the ban "absurd". Two of Zidane's sons were reported to be among the young players investigated by FIFA and he noted: "I've spent all my life in Madrid with my family, with my sons."

An Atletico Madrid statement said: "Our club is not in agreement with the sanction from international football's governing body and will study all the documentation we've received to present an appeal."

The nature of the international transfer market has led to speculation that other leading European clubs could also face investigation by FIFA.

John Holmesdale

HEROES & VILLAINS

Note...fans had help to see Toulouse take on Marseille

TOULOUSE

To help fans attend the French Cup game against Marseille, which was scheduled to kick off at 5pm on a Wednesday, the club provided letters excusing supporters from work.

ROBERTO MANCINI

The Internazionale coach earned praise for his public condemnation of Napoli rival Maurizio Sarri, who called Mancini a "faggot" but was forced to apologise after Mancini claimed Sarri "ought to be ashamed of himself".

JACK BUTLAND

The Stoke City goalkeeper donated £5,000 to Great Britain's women's deaf football team to help them attend June's Deaf World Cup in Italy.

GONZALO HIGUAIN

Two goals in the 3-1 win against Sassuolo took the Argentinian's tally to 20 goals in 20 Serie A games this season for high-flying Napoli.

Hot shot...Gonzalo Higuain of Napoli

YAYA TOURE

The Manchester City and Ivory Coast midfielder showed a high degree of petulance and bitterness as he criticized the decision of CAF not to award him a fifth successive African Player of the Year award.

Sore loser...Yaya Toure failed to win a fifth award

LUIS SUAREZ

The Barcelona striker was banned for two Spanish Cup games after provoking a fracas in the tunnel following a fiesty 4-1 win over Espanyol, during which the Uruguayan was reported to have goaded the opposition by saying: "I am waiting for you, come here. You are a waste of space."

JEROME VALCKE

The Frenchman was sacked from his position as FIFA secretary-general. The 55-year-old had previously been suspended from all football-related activities over allegations of corruption and ticket sales for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

MARCO VERRATTI

The Paris Saint Germain midfielder was given a yellow card when he attempted to pull down the shorts of his Bastia opponent Axel Ngando during their Ligue 1 match. Verratti later claimed that fouling with his feet would have been dangerous.

Cheeky...Marco Verratti saw red for shorts stunt

"It's a demented decision, insane. He's a manager with zero experience, living off his fame as a player"

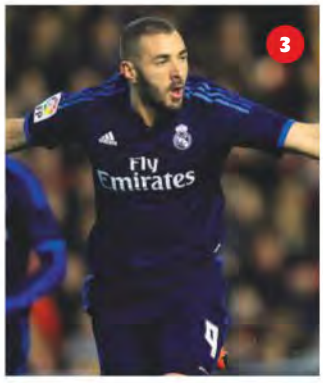
Ottmar Hitzfeld (left) on Zinedine Zidane's appointment as coach of Real Madrid

GOALS we'd like to see again

To see video footage of these goals, and many more that we have selected, scan the QR code using any free QR reader that can be downloaded to your smartphone. You can also see the videos by logging on to http://po.st/9vnyTq

1 HENRIQUE
Brisbane Roar v Melbourne City
With Melbourne keeper Thomas Sorensen joining the attack in the closing minutes, Brisbane break and the Brazilian dribbles out of his own half before scoring from just inside the opposition half.

2 LALLIANZUALA CHHANGTE
India v Nepal
A couple of step-overs before cutting inside and hitting a left-foot shot into the far top corner in the South Asian Football Federation Cup.



3 KARIM BENZEMA
Real Madrid v Valencia
Nicely worked goal with both Gareth Bale and Cristiano Ronaldo disguising passes before Benzema finishes with a drilled, low shot.

4 LIONEL MESSI,
Barcelona v Espanyol
Curls a left-foot free-kick from 30 yards that goes over the wall and in off the underside of the crossbar.

5 LEONARDO PAVOLETTI
Genoa v Palermo
Fantastic volley on the turn from the centre of the penalty area into the top corner.

6 HUGO FIRMINO
Oriental Lisbon v Vitoria Guimaraes II
A free-kick to the far corner of the penalty area is volleyed first time into the far top corner in this Portuguese second-tier game.

WINNERS

PIERRE-EMERICK AUBAMEYANG
The striker is the first Gabonese to be voted African Player of the Year by CAF.

NAPOLI
Were Italy's so-called "winter champions" for the first time since 1989-90. The leaders at the halfway point of a 20-team Serie A have always gone on to win the title.

PANAMA
Clinched the final CONCACAF place at this summer's Copa America Centenario, in the United States, with a 4-0 victory over Cuba.

LOSERS

SERGI GUARDIOLA
Sacked hours after joining Barcelona's B side when the club became aware that he had made a series of anti-Barca tweets in 2013.

RON-ROBERT ZIELER
The Hanover keeper lost all his clothes in a New Year's Eve fire at The Address hotel in Dubai.

SWANSEA CITY
The Premier League club lost to Oxford United of the fourth tier, some 53 places below them in the league system, in the FA Cup.

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"A lion doesn't worry about lambs. He eats them"

Sinisa Mihajlovic responds with law-of-the-jungle disdain to rumours that his job as Milan coach is under threat

Notebook

Highlights from some of our regular on-line contributions

ITALY

Following an easy 5-1 victory at Frosinone, Napoli were the "winter champions". There is, of course, no winter championship; it is just a hypothetical trophy awarded each year to the side in front at the halfway point of the season. The real significance is that in seven out of 10 years, the winter champion has gone on to win the real thing.

Napoli have been winter champions three times before – in 1987, 1988 and 1990 – and a Diego Maradona-inspired side went on to claim the title in 1987 and 1990. However, current coach Maurizio Sarri is keeping his feet firmly on the ground, saying: "You know how much importance I attribute to the title of winter champions? None at all.

"It's just a statistic. There are teams with more certainty than us. I mean the team that has won the last four titles. I've always said Juventus were the real favourites."

Paddy Agnew

Winter warmers...Napoli

Straight answer... Jonathan Viera

SPAIN

It was the perfect answer that said much about image and reality. After Atletico Madrid's 3-0 win at Las Palmas, the host's striker Jonathan Viera was asked a leading question but did not give the "right" answer.

"Atletico get a lot without doing much...", the question began. To which Viera shot back: "It might not look like a lot from the outside, but on the inside it is. It's bloody hard."

Atletico are top on merit. And they have conceded fewer goals than any other team in Europe's top divisions.

Sid Lowe

GERMANY

Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, the Bayern Munich chairman and head of the European Clubs Association, has relaunched the idea of a European Super League.

Rummenigge believes a 20-team league is very much a possibility, chiefly because of the ever-growing gulf between the big clubs and the rest in Germany, France, Italy, Spain and England.

He claims football has to adjust to "the new challenges of globalisation", and the Super League could either be run under a UEFA banner or privately.

Nick Bidwell

Plan...Karl-Heinz Rummenigge

In dreamland...Wendell Lira

BRAZIL

Four days after winning the Puskas prize for scoring the best goal of 2015, Wendell Lira still had his head in the clouds.

"There are no words to describe it," he said of the FIFA Ballon D'Or event, which was held in Zurich.

"It's so rich, packed with stars, seeing all those famous people. And the amazing thing is seeing your own name in the middle of it – and when I won I was congratulated by Neymar, Kaka..."

His goal was a twisting overhead kick described by Neymar as a move from *The Karate Kid*. It was an extraordinary moment from an ordinary player, whose career reveals much about those who seek to make a living in Brazilian football.

When he heard of his nomination, Lira was unemployed and musing whether to quit the game and work full time in his mother's snack bar. At 27 he had already played for nine clubs, while the dreaded footballers' age of 30 loomed ever closer.

His moment of glory last March came while playing for Goianesia in a local state championship game against Atletico Goianense – who played in the national top flight from 2010 to 2012.

The goal was watched by just 342 paying customers – explaining why so many Brazilian players are on the breadline.

Tim Vickery

Weekly notes from Brazil, Spain, Germany and Italy at **worldsoccer.com**

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Looking into football's future...and finding its past

Prodigy...Milan keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma made his debut this season at the age of 16

With bouquets to my colleagues on *World Soccer* for providing the raw material, I shall plunge headfirst into the squads they have recorded for the teams in the top flights of England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

In these lists of names, I tried to find some hidden guide to the present state of the sport, and maybe cleverly unearth a hint about its future. And I was truly amazed to find where it took me.

A total of 98 teams and 2,759 players includes 313 goalkeepers, who I regard as a separate and really rather mysterious category.

The youngest among all 2,759 players is Milan goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, who is 16 – although he is due to celebrate his next birthday in February. Now this is puzzling, because goalkeepers are usually the oldest players in any group – and in this group the Methuselah is Leicester City's Mark Schwarzer, who is still going at 43 – but a 16-year-old pro keeper suggests all sorts of marvels ahead. He must surely be well over 6ft tall – isn't that a basic requirement? – and at 16 he surely hasn't finished growing yet. I would advise him to switch to basketball.

Looking at the ages of the other 2,446 players, I've counted 249 teenagers and Italy leads the youth stakes, with 73 teenagers, which is an average of 3.7 per squad.

Germany is next with 61 teenagers, at 3.4 per squad, followed by England (42 at 2.1 per squad), France (39 at 2 per squad) and Spain in last place (34 at 1.7 per squad).

Italy's leading role is suspect, though, because 28 of its teenagers come from just three clubs - Genoa (11 - the largest number for any club in this survey), Roma (10) and Verona (7).

While the stats seem to support the notion that the clubs are busy nurturing home-grown talent, they obviously don't tell the whole story. They don't tell us how many of those teenagers get playing time. Not too many, I suspect. And they don't tell us that, of the 249 teenagers, 81 (close to one third) are foreign imports, including 38 from nations outside the European Union. These are players to whom the FIFA ban on international transfers before the age of 18 applies – meaning they can't have spent much time with their clubs. That is assuming that the clubs are adhering to the rules – and we know that some clubs do not.

Then, an intriguing aspect of these stats fell upon me. We're used to hearing – and maybe experiencing – that knowledge of the past helps us to understand the present. But I had found a situation which was working in reverse, where modern stats shed light on bygone years, adding lustre to a player who is already one of the sport's all-time greats.

I found myself thinking about precocious teenagers from the past. Only one, really. Here are today's stats, making it clear that football is a sport in which it is rare for teenagers to star at the top level – which throws a glittering light on the achievement of the 17-year-old Pele during the 1958 World Cup.

At the time, Pele's triumph was much applauded, but I don't think it occurred to any of us that we would never see anything like it again. It seemed likely that Pele had blazed a trail, that future teenage superstars, would follow. But that hasn't happened.

No other teenager has even come close to being the star of a World Cup - in fact teenagers are rarely seen on the World Cup stage, where the average age of a winning team is much closer to 29 than to 19. Maybe the 17-year-old Diego Maradona could have been such a player in 1978, but coach Cesar Menotti worried about his tender age and left him out of the Argentina squad. Maradona's World Cup moment came eight years later, when 25.

> Football is a sport in which it is rare for teenagers to star

Pele was not an outsize boy, he did not dominate with size. He simply had right from the start, in his feet, in his head, in his body, more of the true skills of football than anyone else. And it was all there at age 16 when he nailed down a starting spot on the Santos team.

Now, 57 years on, we have today's stats letting us know that, however brilliant we thought Pele was in 1958, we were undervaluing him. WS

"I was liquidated. I feel like an innocent person in a prison cell on a murder charge"

Rolf Fringer, who was sacked as Swiss club Lucerne's director of sport for daring to suggest the removal of coach Markus Babbel

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

EUROPE

Egypt midfielder **MOHAMED ELNENY** joined Arsenal from Swiss side Basle for £5million. For details of all the moves in Europe's top five leagues, go to **www.worldsoccer.com/transfers**

LUCIANO SPALLETTI took charge of Roma for a second time, replacing Rudi Garcia, while **GUILLERMO BARROS SCHELOTTO** became Palermo's third boss of the Serie A season.

German calling...Carlo Ancelotti is off to the Bundesliga next term

Bayern turn to Ancelotti

CARLO ANCELOTTI, 56, will succeed Pep Guardiola as coach of Bayern Munich next season after the Italian agreed a three-year contract.

Ancelotti, the former Juventus, Milan, Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain boss, left Real Madrid last summer.

Stuttgart handed caretaker coach **JURGEN KRAMNY** a permanent deal and ex Werder Bremen and Eintracht Frankfurt boss **THOMAS SCHAAF** replaced Michael Frontzeck at Hanover with the team second from bottom of the Bundesliga.

Swansea City employed former Udinese boss **FRANCESCO GUIDOLIN** to work alongside interim manager Alan Curtis until the end of the season.

Second coming...Luciano Spalletti

Lyon replaced Hubert Fournier with his assistant **BRUNO GENESIO** until the end of the Ligue 1 season, while **ROLLAND COURBIS** took over from Philippe Montanier at Rennes. **PASCAL BAILLS** stepped in for Courbis at Montpellier. Monaco named former Chelsea and Real Madrid midfielder **CLAUDE MAKELELE** as technical director.

Having dismissed Julen Lopetegui, Porto replaced him with **JOSE PESEIRO**, who had been coach of Egypt's Al Ahly.

IVAN TOMIC was named Partizan Belgrade's third coach of the campaign, replacing Ljubinko Drulovic with the club trailing city rivals and Serb league leaders Red Star by 26 points at the winter break.

Defending Austrian champions Red Bull Salzburg appointed former Watford boss and Barcelona midfielder **OSCAR GARCIA** as coach.

JOSE MORAIS, who was Chelsea's assistant coach until Jose Mourinho was sacked in December, was named boss of Turkish side Antalyaspor.

Former Soviet Union and Russia midfielder **IGOR DOBROVOLSKIY** was appointed coach of Moldova, ex-Porto striker **EDGARAS JANKAUSKAS** was named Lithuania coach and Montenegro appointed **LJUBISA TUMBAKOVIC**.

ROB MAAS was put in control of Vitesse after **PETER BOSZ** left the Dutch club to join Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv and replaced **SLAVISA JOKANOVIC**, who took over at English second-tier side Fulham.

PETRE GRIGORAS became Romanian side Targu Mures' fourth coach of the season, replacing Cristiano Bergodi.

SOUTH AMERICA

Uruguay striker **SEBASTIAN ABREU** made Paraguay's Sol de America the 22nd club of his 21-year career after leaving Nacional in his homeland.

A Libertadores Cup winner with LDU Quito in 2008 and San Lorenzo in 2014, Argentinian coach **EDGARDO BAUZA** took charge of Brazil's Sao Paulo.

RUBEN DARIO INSUA, who led San Lorenzo to Sudamericana Cup success in 2002, was named boss of Bolivia's Bolivar.

WALTER CLAVERI was named coach of Guatemala after Ivan Sopegno quit.

CONCACAF

Former USA goalkeeper **BRAD FRIEDEL** was named coach of his country's under-19 side.

Porto appointment...Jose Peseiro

AFRICA

AHMED "MIDO" HOSSAM was appointed coach of Egyptian champions Zamalek for a second time, replacing Brazilian boss Marcos Paqueta.

Portuguese coach **PAULO DUARTE** took charge of Burkina Faso.

ASIA

Chinese champions Guangzhou Evergrande sold Brazilian striker **ELKESON** to rivals Shanghai SIPG for a Super League record fee of €17m.

HONG MYUNG-BO, who was South Korea's coach at the 2014 World Cup, took charge of China's Hangzhou Greentown.

"It's important to be myself and try not to copy others. That would be the biggest mistake I could make"

Patrick Vieira begins his head coaching career at New York City FC

Appointments, sackings and loans

OUT

China split...Alain Perrin

EUROPE

PEPE MEL was sacked by Real Betis for a second time after defeat at Getafe left them 15th in La Liga.

Shamrock Rovers' winger **DAMIEN DUFF**, who was capped 100 times by the Republic of ireland and won two Premier League titles with Chelsea, announced his retirement at the age of 36.

CARLOS MARCHENA, who was a member of the victorious Spain squads at Euro 2008 and the World Cup two years later, has retired. The 36-year-old defender last played in the Indian Super League for Kerala Blasters.

SOUTH AMERICA

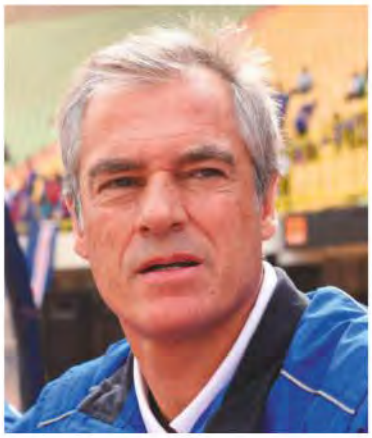
Former Colombia captain **MARIO YEPES**, whose club sides included Paris Saint-Germain and Milan, announced his retirement at the age of 40.

AFRICA

RUI AGUAS resigned as the coach of Cape Verde's national team, while Zimbabwe sacked **KALISTO PASUWA**.

ASIA

China parted company with national coach **ALAIN PERRIN**.



Resigned...Rui Aguas has left Cape Verde

Sampaoli leaves Chile

JORGE SAMPAOLI stepped down as coach of Chile in the wake of a disagreement with new federation president Arturo Salah.

Sampaoli guided Chile to their first Copa America triumph last summer and signed a new deal following victories over Brazil and Peru in the 2018 World Cup qualifying campaign.

However, poor results then followed – with Chile being held at home by Colombia and losing 3-0 away to Uruguay – leaving Sampaoli keen to move to a European club.

Salah and the federation were adament that their coach should stick to his new contract but eventually all parties reached a compromise.

Europe bound...Jorge Sampaoli has his eye on a club job

OBITUARIES

STEVE GOHOURI
(1981-2016)
Capped 12 times by Ivory Coast, the former Borussia Monchengladbach and Wigan Athletic defender went missing after the Christmas party of his German club TSV Steinbach and his body was later found in the River Rhine in the city of Krefeld.

JIMMY HILL
(1928-2015)
Played 297 games for Fulham and, as chairman of the Professional Footballers' Association, led the campaign for the scrapping of the maximum wage. Later became manager and then the chairman of Coventry City, and enjoyed a long and distinguished career in broadcasting, hosting BBC's *Match of The Day* programme from 1973 to 1998, having started in broadcasting with LWT's *The Big Match*.

DON HOWE
(1935-2015)
Former West Bromwich Albion and Arsenal full-back who won 23 England caps, before establishing himself as a renowned coach for club and country, helping Arsenal win the double in 1971 and working under Ron Greenwood, Bobby Robson and Terry Venables with the national side.

PAVEL SRNICEK
(1968-2015)
Capped 49 times by the Czech Republic, and a member of the squad that were runners-up at Euro 96, the former Newcastle United goalkeeper died nine days after suffering a cardiac arrest while jogging in his home town of Ostrava.

MANUEL VELAZQUEZ
(1943-2016)
Won six Liga titles and three Spanish Cups, and was part of the Real Madrid side that won their sixth European Cup in 1966.

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Plastering over the cracks...but Sepp Blatter's world has come crumbling down

Blatter is history...

...but his successor at the February 26 election faces an immense challenge to restore credibility to FIFA

Perversely, probably the greatest service Sepp Blatter ever delivered to world football in general, and FIFA in particular, was to break his promise not to stand for re-election last year.

The fury Blatter generated in the West – and its English language media – provided the impetus for critics and investigators to re-double their efforts into unmasking the culture of corruption to which he had contributed, at the least by acquiescence, in the corridors of FIFA power.

By insisting on carrying on – which had been his clear intention from at least two years out – Blatter also encouraged the greediest of neighbours around FIFA's ExCo boardroom to believe their regional reigns, built on patronage and/or bribery, were secure for years to come.

Hence almost everyone – bar a handful including Julio Grondona, his death the ultimate act of escapology – were safely checked in at the Baur au Lac on that fateful morning of May 27 last year when the hotel's roof fell in, so to speak.

Not only were the likes of Jeffrey Webb, Jose Maria Marin and Eugenio Figueredo safely checked in, they were safely carrying on shady business as usual and thus all the paperwork, emails, electronic banking links etc were all still in working order. Had Blatter been winding down his own operation – or, at least, negotiating an "understanding" with his preferred "dauphin" Michel Platini – then his acolytes might already have been covering their tracks.

Instead, the illicit wheeling and dealing was all still a-whirl, with the Copa Centenario the next commercial and broadcasting vehicle to be ripped off.

Had Platini taken over from Blatter in May, it is also perfectly safe to assume that the world would never have learned of the "disloyal payment" between them. It's also safe to assume that Platini would have replaced Jerome Valcke within weeks of assuming power and FIFA's departing secretary-general would have bought himself a new super-fast car to celebrate and zoomed off into a comfortably early – and quiet – corporate retirement.

> FIFA must get it right at last, not just for itself but the credibility of all sport

Platini was his own worst enemy. In both 2011 and 2015 he had the opportunity to negotiate a presidential takeover. Sure, it would have been difficult to have prised his fingers off the reins of power but he could have been "persuaded". Instead, the house of dollar bills collapsed in a far more spectacular fashion than anyone could have expected.

Not that FIFA has been alone. The governance scandals which have wreaked havoc within cycling's UCI, athletics' IAAF and tennis have proved that worldwide sport has been open to corruption through its fantastic popular and financial success.

Sport in general, and football in particular in this case, is run by governing bodies which possess limited control over their activities. They may organise competitions and commit to lucrative contracts but, as civil organisations, they lack policing powers. Nor are they subject to the corporate laws of business.

Sports federations exist in a murky nether world which is why more than 40 have headquarters in Switzerland whose banks are only now being dragged – kicking and screaming – into the real world of corporate responsibility. As much as that is possible with bankers...

The bigger the sport, the bigger the temptations – and the bigger they are, the harder they fall. Thus FIFA; thus Blatter.

So, by the evening of Friday, February 26, FIFA will have a new president, only the ninth in its 112-year history. He will emerge from among the five candidates entered into the race to succeed the disgraced, banned, long-serving 79-year-old.

When the 209 member associations come to cast their votes in Zurich, several hopefuls will probably have dropped out, either feeling they have no chance or having reached accord with one of the likely winners on a post-election reshuffle in the corridors of power.

To be fair, this is not the most exciting quintet. But perhaps that is all to the good. FIFA needs to abandon the cult of personality leader in favour of a hands-on, head-down president. Only such single-minded focus offers any prospect of rescuing an organisation whose acronym has become a byword for corruption.

In vain have Blatter and the similarly banned Platini, as well as some of the candidates and members of the derided ExCo, insisted that the organisation and its staff should not be tarnished by the greedy antics down the years of some within a few of the confederations. Too late. The damage is done. Football has no

room and no time for any more defensive, self-justifying excuses for an acquiescent tolerance of the intolerable.

Joao Havelange, Chuck Blazer, Webb, Nicolas Leoz, Ricardo Teixeira and – despite his protestations of innocence – even interim president Issa Hayatou are the tip of an iceberg of reputation-scarred men whose behaviour has torn a jagged gash threatening to sink the FIFA ship.

Blatter, who loves his nautical metaphors, conceded regularly over the past few years FIFA had been tossed about in stormy seas. He was wrong. FIFA has not merely been tossed about but shipped so much water of scandal that it is sinking beneath the waves of worldwide derision.

All that stands between FIFA and oblivion is the Congress of February 26. A new progressive president and the start of meaningful, root-and-branch reform would provide some buoyancy and buy time. Nothing more. The Extraordinary Congress is not the beginning of the end of FIFA's troubles, merely the end of the beginning.

When Blatter sought to cling on to power last year, Prince Ali of Jordan, backed by a European federation which – for all its noises off-stage could not find its own viable candidate – collected 73 votes to deny Blatter a first-round knockout. Four days later he dramatically offered to "lay down my mandate" while resurrecting a reform programme.

Clearly, he planned to ride back to power. But then the affair of the "disloyal payment" to Platini prompted a criminal investigation by the Swiss authorities and, by happy coincidence, offered FIFA's ethics committee the evidence it needed to banish Blatter and Platini from the game.

The pair intend to appeal – first, as regulation demands, to FIFA and then to the Court of Arbitration for Sport. That takes not merely weeks but months. By the time a three-person CAS panel sits down to review the evidence FIFA will have a new president. Indeed, UEFA may also have a new president as the wheels have been put in motion for an election, if necessary, ahead of the European Championship finals in France.

Defiant...Michel Platini is to appeal his ban

Platini has thus gone the same way as South Korea's banned Chung Mong-joon in not even being able to submit a candidacy claim. Former Trinidad & Tobago international David Nakhid and Liberia federation president Musa Bility were both barred from standing by the ad hoc electoral committee and failed to overturn the verdict at CAS.

This left the famous five: Prince Ali bin Al Hussein (Jordan, former FIFA Asian vice-president); Jerome Champagne (France, former senior FIFA official); Gianni Infantino (Switzerland, general secretary of UEFA and Platini's back-up); Tokyo Sexwale (South African businessman and head of FIFA's Israel-Palestine monitoring panel); and Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al-Khalifda (Bahraini president of the Asian Football Confederation and hence a current FIFA vice-president). How many will make it to the election stage on the day remains a matter of guesswork.

Before the election, however, comes perhaps a more important step when Congress comes to vote on the reform package recommended by the ExCo from its meeting in early December. This includes term limits for president and ExCo members, the ultimate replacement of the ExCo by an expanded "council" with more women, tighter integrity checks and full transparency on remuneration.

More than a few advocates of reform will hold their breath because such changes affecting statutes demand a three-quarters majority. Approval is crucial not merely for the specific changes but as a signal that the FIFA family as a whole has, belatedly, understood the need for a change of culture. Then comes the election.

The process is simple. Each candidate who makes it as far as Congress will have a 15-minute window in which to explain why he should be the new president. Then it comes to voting. A two-thirds majority is needed in the first round (which Blatter failed narrowly to obtain last May). After that a simple majority (105) is sufficient.

Almost certainty two rounds of voting will be needed. Very possibly even three. The new president will then close Congress, almost certainly summon an ExCo meeting for the following morning and start to plot the way ahead.

Time will not be on his side. A further Ordinary Congress looms in Mexico City in May. By then the world will expect not merely to hear talk of progress but to see evidence Blatter's world is history. FIFA must get it right at last: not only for itself but for the credibility of all of sport. **WS**

THE CANDIDATES: WHAT THEY SAY AND WHERE THEY SAY IT

PRINCE ALI BIN AL HUSSEIN
Jordan, former FIFA Asian vice-president
worldsgame.com

JEROME CHAMPAGNE
France, former senior FIFA official
jeromechampagne2016.com

GIANNI INFANTINO
Switzerland, general secretary of UEFA
fifaforward2016.com

TOKYO SEXWALE
South Africa, businessman (website under construction)

SHEIKH SALMAN BIN EBRAHIM AL-KHALIFA
Bahrain, AFC president and FIFA vice-president
shaikhsalman.org

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Campaigning...PFA chairman Jimmy Hill briefs journalists over an intended players' strike

Football's debt to Jimmy Hill

It was sad to read, on his recent death, that Jimmy Hill, such a versatile and vital figure, had spent his declining years plagued by Alzheimer's disease.

There is no doubt that footballers in England owe him a tremendous debt. When he succeeded Jimmy Guthrie, Portsmouth's 1939 FA Cup-winning captain, as PFA chairman there were some who thought he had been harshly treated. In retrospect, I think it fair to say that footballers needed a rather more subtle, less confrontational leader to plead their cause. And in Hill they arguably got that.

Supported by the PFA secretary Cliff Lloyd, yet with no overt backing from Danny Blanchflower, by far the most eloquent footballer of his generation, Hill soldiered on in face of the opposition of the League's xenophobic Alan Hardaker and the intransigent Joe Richards.

In 1960, I was given the first-ever sports column by the *Sunday Times* and rowed in behind Jimmy Hill. The ultimate satisfaction came when the paper, traditionally conservative, ran a leader exhorting the players to strike. In the event, they didn't have to as Jimmy and the PFA won.

In later ebullient years, with endless appearances on TV, I felt that the game at large, and the players in particular, tended to forget what they owed him. He made a great success in regenerating Coventry City and taking them into the top division, and saved his old club, Fulham, from extinction. Ubiquitous was the word that summed up Jimmy Hill.

> I felt that the game at large, and the players in particular, tended to forget what they owed him

I even remember seeing him pop up from the crowd as a linesman at Arsenal when the referee was injured.

Who else, you thought.

Not the Lineker that I know

The leading ladies of the popular press are somewhat at odds over Gary Lineker, who is splitting up with his second wife.

One columnist writes of "a sizeable age gap and wildly different personalities. For the second Mrs Lineker is extrovert, chatty and emotional, just as Lineker is famously controlled and – according to his detractors – cold and boring. She was then the lively young foil to his dependable dullness." Eh?

I have known, liked and admired Gary for many years and find the description ludicrous, as anyone who saw him expertly and amusingly preside on BBC TV over the *Have I Got News For You* programme would surely testify. A dry humour, seldom more in evidence than when one saw him at the Azteca in Mexico City smashed in the mouth by a Paraguayan defender, forcing him off the field, only for him to return and score.

"It was an accident," he said afterwards sitting by the pitch. "At least, I hope it was."

Split...Gary Lineker and second wife, Danielle Bux

Lamented by Wenger: the traditional centre-forward

Suddenly, hot on the heels of articles proclaiming the death of the centre-forward, comes news that a profession of clubs are looking for just that supposedly obsolescent breed.

Arsenal's manager Arsene Wenger, who at least has a traditional centre-forward in Olivier Giroud – whom not so long ago he seemed ready to replace – is in favour of specialist coaching "clinics" to develop centre-forwards.

"When I arrived in England you could see in every club," says Wenger, "a forward who could head the ball, was dangerous on crosses and who was highly committed physically. But when you look around now, you see that less. It makes you wonder, what is going on here?"

This from a manager once able to rejoice in the likes of two prolific centre-forwards in Thierry Henry, whom he converted from a right-winger, and Robin Van Persie, who initially preferred to play just behind the front line.

Inactive...Emmanuel Adebayor no longer gets a game with Tottenham Hotspur

Such is the desperate growing desire for authentic centre-forwards that there is even talk of the ever-intransigent Emmanuel Adebayor being brought out of inactivity. There has never been any doubt about his physical power, natural ability and scoring capacity with foot or head, when the spirit moves him. But that can happen in bewildering fits and starts.

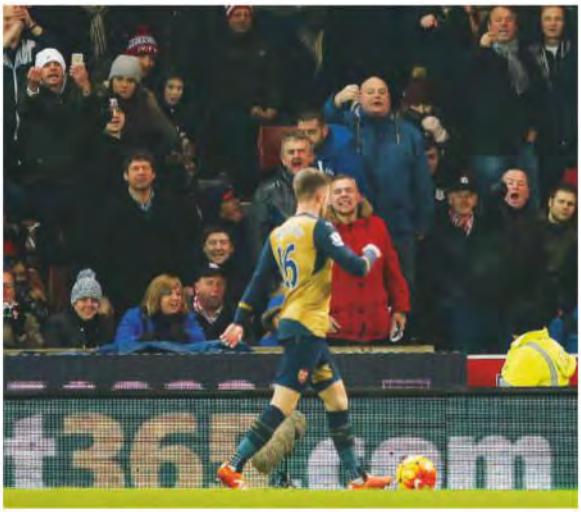
Meanwhile at Liverpool, who hardly score a profusion of goals, Christian Benteke, who looks the ideal part with his towering physique, seems to be spending most of his time on the bench. Why?

How low can you go, Stoke fans?

How vile, how low, can football fans get? When Stoke City recently played at home to Arsenal, a section of their fans taunted Aaron Ramsey over the shocking injury he received from an outrageous challenge by Ryan Shawcross which put him out of the game for nine months and threatened to finish his career completely.

In an ideal football world – but we shall never see it – the perpetrator of such an outrage would remain suspended for as long as it took the victim to recover. Meanwhile, we have these dehumanised Stoke fans gloating over Ramsey's disaster.

Dehumanised is indeed the word.



Abuse...Stoke City fans target Arsenal midfielder Aaron Ramsey

Pity poor Lawton, one of my heroes

There is a terrible pathos about the exchange of letters, recently published, between two stars of their time: Tommy Lawton, supreme goalscorer, and Richard Attenborough, actor and director. What Lawton sent were virtually begging letters. Attenborough had clearly helped him initially, but now there were limits.

It might, on the face of it, seem a curious combination, but Attenborough was for some years a director of Chelsea whom Lawton, of course, joined from Everton in 1945.

He played and shone in the first professional match I ever watched; at Wembley in 1942. It was memorable, among other things for a 10-year-old, for the fact that Winston Churchill's wife inspected the teams then announced somewhat breathlessly that she was off to greet her husband on his return from seeing Stalin in Moscow.

England won 3-0 that day and Lawton scored. For years he was a prolific centre-forward, starting with Burnley, blossoming at Everton, moving to Chelsea, and then, for reasons which still seem opaque, dropping down into the Third Division South with Notts County.

When boarding at Charterhouse school, I'd cycle the 10 miles to watch him play at Aldershot. On the first occasion, he hardly exerted himself. On the second he scored. But what was he doing there?

He published an autobiography, *Football Is My Business*, which my friends and I rushed out to buy, never noting that there was no mention of a mysteriously absent father in his Bolton childhood.

Successful management eluded him, as did the countless millions such a star would make today. Poverty ensued and prison at one time loomed but was escaped. The only time I met him was at a gathering in a London hotel where he appalled Ron Greenwood with his sycophantic behaviour towards his local employer. I found it in its implications sad.

I made him the protagonist of a novel, *The Dying Of The Light*, in which, to guard against libel, I had to turn the centre-forward into a goalkeeper.

What would any club give for such a centre-forward today?

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James Montague reports

HOLLAND

The tarnishing of a golden past

Den Haag and Twente's plight highlight Dutch woes

Inside a green-and-gold coloured coach, parked outside the Kyocera Stadion – home of Eredivisie side ADO Den Haag – Jacco Van Leeuwen counts the packets of pasta, cookies, soup, marshmallows, sugar and powdered milk piled up around his feet.

"Every year ADO Den Haag is doing a lot for the poor and sick people," says Van Leeuwen, who is chairman of the club's supporters association, as he takes charge of yet more bags donated by fans on their way to that evening's league game against Willem II, the last before the winter break.

The supporters were collecting for a food bank that would distribute the packets to the local poor. In total, 451 separate packages covered the floor. "In this rich country, that so many people need to use the food bank, it's not right," adds Van Leeuwen disapprovingly. Many people, he explains, had volunteered to help refugees in recent months, making it harder to attract donations for the Dutch poor already here. "Whether they were born in Turkey or Suriname or Holland, it doesn't matter."

Den Haag's supporters have a fearsome reputation, possibly only eclipsed by those of Millwall in England when it comes to a history of violence and skulduggery. In 1982, they burned down their own stadium, the old Zuiderpark. Yet the club has always maintained strong links with the area's overwhelming white, working-class population.

"You want to do something," claims Van Leeuwen, before the coach is driven away and he leaves to take his seat in the stadium. "Besides, football is a way of life. Not just a match."

The talk on the supporters' coach and in the stadium wasn't about the food bank, nor the game that was about to kick off in the middle of a storm. It concerned the club's own sudden and unexpectedly bleak financial future – and the whereabouts of Chinese owner, Wang Hui, who bought a 98 per cent stake in 2014 for £6.8million with much fanfare 18 months previously.

The club may not have won the league since the end of World War II, and never during the modern era, but Wang Hui – a wealthy Beijing-based patent lawyer with his own law firm who had recently moved into sports marketing – promised to turn the 110-year old club into a powerhouse. Den Haag (the Hague) was an international city, he reasoned, and it deserved an international football club.

Money, players and prestige would ➤

Togetherness... ADO Den Haag

Old habits...a Den Haag supporter with a shirt bearing the words "Grandfather Hooligan" does little to dispel the fans' fearsome reputation

see ADO challenge the dominant trio of Ajax, PSV and Feyenoord, who between them have won the league on all but three occasions over the past 35 seasons.

But after an initial flurry of appearances Wang was nowhere to be seen, leaving a series of missed payment deadlines that could lead the Dutch federation, the KNVB, to place the club in special financial measures. It also left many fans, including Van Leeuwen, confused and angry.

"In Den Haag, the character of the people is that when you don't like it, you say it directly," he says. "You don't hide. So we have a rough reputation.

"He promised European football, so everyone was very happy with him. We showed a banner with Wang on it."

But after meeting Wang last year, and being impressed by him, the supporters' patience is now wearing thin. "These problems have changed people's mind," says Van Leeuwen"

It has been a busy season for the KNVB, reflecting both the changing nature of football club ownership in Europe, and the difficulties that small and medium-sized football leagues are having competing with the financial muscle being flexed in England, Germany and Spain.

When it comes to ownership, Dutch football does not have the same rules as Germany, with its much-vaunted 50+1 rule. Wholesale foreign takeovers are allowed, but the KNVB keeps a close eye on the financial situation at all its professional clubs.

To receive a licence to play, a club needs to submit its accounts for scrutiny and approval. It is then given a rating from one to three. A rating of three means the club is in fine financial health. Two means some work needs to be done. Category one is reserved for the worst cases, where the KNVB has to intervene so that a club follows an approved plan to become solvent. If they don't follow it, the club risks losing points – or even its licence.

Twente – one of the few clubs to win the title outside of the big three over the past 35 years, under Steve McClaren in 2010 – are currently the highest-profile category-one club. Their success, which included access to the Champions League, could only be sustained with increased investment. When they failed to win the league the following season, losing to Ajax on the final day of the campaign, the club fell into deep financial trouble. So much so that chairman Joost Munsterman – a businessman from Enschede who made his fortune in publishing and bankrolled his home town club's success – sought other sources of finance.

Twente entered into a third-party ownership (TPO) deal with Doyen Sports Investments, the controversial investment vehicle which owns Neymar's sponsorship rights and held a percentage in Chelsea's on-loan striker Radamel Falcao. Twente borrowed €5m against future sales of their top players, including Dusan Tadic, who would later move to Southampton.

But when a mysterious website called "Football Leaks" – based in Portugal but operating from Russian internet servers – released documents related to the deal between Twente and Doyen, it became clear that the deal effectively gave Doyen control of Twente's transfers, which is against both KNVB and FIFA rules.

FIFA has banned TPO – the deal between Doyen and Twente was signed before the ban – while the KNVB came down hard on the club. An independent commission found they had deliberately misled the KNVB. They were fined £35,000 and banned from European football for three years, while also being placed under even tighter financial measures and told they would certainly lose their right to play in the league if they err again. They currently sit third from bottom in the Eredivisie.

ADO are presently rated as a category-two club but that is likely to change and they could soon find themselves in a similar situation to Twente. A promised £3.1m investment for the coming season, which the club said it had agreed with Wang, did not materialise. The club held a press conference, declaring that it was looking at a £1m liquidity crisis and admitting that they had not been able to contact Wang for weeks.

"The communication is very poor, that puts the relationship under pressure," ADO's managing director Jan Willem Wigt said in early December.

The uncertainty left many people in the city unhappy. "You cant run a football club on a daily basis from Beijing," says local politician Tom De Bruijn, a member of the Den Haag municipality – who own the stadium and have a golden share in the club. That golden share gives the municipality the right to block any takeover, but only if they can present a rival bid offering the same amount. When the municipality couldn't pull together a consortium of local businessmen in time – their "preferred choice" according to De Bruijn – the Wang deal went ahead.

In the months that followed, Wang was a regular fixture in Den Haag. He had bought the club, in part, to tap into its international reputation, as well as Holland's reputation for coaching. He had hoped to take ADO coaches to Beijing to work with young players at the former school of current Chinese premier Xi Jingping, a huge football fan who visited Manchester City while on a recent state trip to the UK.

Shortly after the trip – which saw former Chinese international Sun Jihai controversially inducted into the National Football Museum Hall of Fame alongside George Best, Bobby Charlton and Kenny Dalglish – City were recipients of a £235m investment from a Chinese consortium.

Wang, meanwhile, would be seen at Den

> "The character of the people is that when you don't like it, you say it directly. You don't hide. So we have a rough reputation"
>
> **Den Haag fan Jacco Van Leeuwen**

Absent...away fans were banned when Den Haag hosted Ajax

Local heroes...keeper Martin Hansen with a club mascot

Haag's games, celebrating wildly. On one occasion he trained with the first team and even presented the Dutch PM, Mark Rutte, with an ADO shirt during a trade visit to China. But then the phone calls suddenly stopped and emails went unanswered.

"It is extremely difficult to communicate," says De Bruijn, who adds that the club's supervisory board had a Chinese member who has never been there. "We don't know if he even exists!"

While De Bruijn believed the impasse would be solved, others were less sure. In one interview former national coach Dick Advocaat, who had initially been approached by Wang to take an advisory role at the club, called for the "Chinese influence" in ADO to come to an end.

At the Willem II game there were no chants against Wang, nor any banners. The supporters kept their powder dry so not to anger him. Van Leeuwen even wrote a polite open letter to Wang, inviting him to a meeting with fans the following week to explain what was going on. After all, there was virtually no chance that ADO could compete with the big three without him. "Yes, I think he will be here next week," said Van Leeuwen hopefully when asked whether he thought the letter might work.

A few weeks later, early in the new year, the Kyocera Stadium is bathed in the harsh light of a low sun. Snow still covers the floor from the previous night's flurry as fans take their seats for the game against Ajax.

This fixture is considered one of Dutch football's highest-risk games due to past violence – not to mention racist and anti-Semitic chants. Ajax fans have been banned for more than five years. And Wang wasn't there either. The money wasn't paid and he certainly did not turn up for his proposed meeting with Van Leeuwen and the rest of the Den Haag supporters' group.

The club announced it would have to scale down its ambitions to balance its budget and prevent being labelled a category-one problem by the KNVB.

"Well, obviously at this time it is not very clear," coach Henk Fraser said when asked whether he had any money for transfers. "It seems like we will have to sell first."

The status quo remained on the field, as Ajax beat ADO 1-0. Any illusion Den Haag could still compete with what improvements they gained in the summer, when Wang's money promised a different future, were gone. Instead of looking towards Europe, the club's future was now uncertain. But it's the same for many Dutch clubs.

Teams from Holland once dominated European football and their players filled the squads of the continent's top teams. But it is nearly 21 years since Ajax were the last Dutch side to be European champions. These days, the performances of Eredivisie teams in the Champions League have been so bad that the country is in danger of losing its automatic qualification spot in the group stage.

And, of course, the national team will not be at Euro 2016... WS

Unhappy...fans' patience with absentee owner Wang Hui (right) is wearing thin

"You cant run a football club on a daily basis from Beijing,"

Den Haag politician Tom De Bruijn

eyewitness

Howard Johnson reports

FRANCE

Statement of intent

Lyon unveil their new Parc OL home

The notoriously hard-nosed Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas showed himself to be human after all on Saturday, January 9. In charge of the club for a whopping 29 years, Aulas had a visible lump in his throat and a tear in his eye at the inauguration of Parc OL, the new 59,186-capacity stadium that replaces the old Stade de Gerland.

It was no surprise the 66-year-old was overcome with emotion as the celebratory ribbon was cut before Lyon's game against bottom club Troyes. It has been a hell of a personal battle to turn his vision for a new type of football ground into a reality.

Ten years ago, Aulas was already dreaming of a new stadium that would be the base on which he would create a Lyon team capable of challenging the elite of the European game. But the trials and tribulations of building an arena entirely with private money meant it was only on November 12, 2013 that he was finally able to lay the first stone of what he believed at the time would be called the Stade des Lumieres.

As it turns out, the ground is now called Parc Olympique Lyonnais, at least until the naming rights are sold. But that little vignette shows what has always been Aulas's primary concern in building the club's new home – that investment should come from the private sector.

Traditionally, French stadiums have been built in large part with public funding. That has often resulted in a tense relationship between the clubs playing in the stadium and the political factions who are stakeholders in varying degrees.

Despite the fact that the stadium project – which includes Lyon's training centre, a business zone, a medical centre, hotels, restaurants and a sports museum – has cost around €640million (with the ground itself gobbling up €410m), public money has only been used to improve access infrastructure to the site at Decines-Charpieu, 12km to the east of Lyon.

This means that Aulas has his wish. The new complex is his to manage as he sees fit, giving the club the autonomy to use the ground to drive the kind of revenues he knows will be needed if Lyon are ever to become one of Europe's elite outfits.

The 100 or so journalists who were treated to a sneak preview of the ground two days before the game with Troyes got a taste of an impressive state-of-the-art stadium – the third largest in France, behind Stade de France and Marseille's Stade Velodrome.

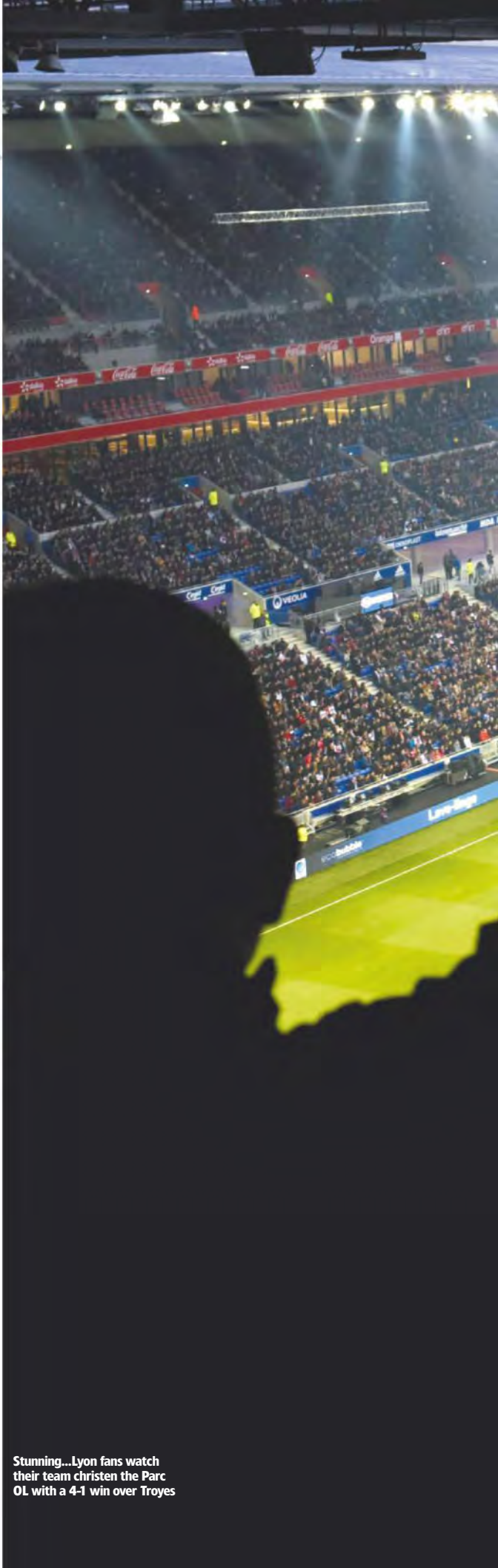
Despite the fact that finishing touches are still lacking in a few places, there is no doubt that it is an inspiring place both to play and watch football.

"When we started out on this project, we told ourselves that a big club defines itself not only by its performances on the pitch, but by its performance off it too," explained Aulas. "So we started to imagine developing a stadium with the kind of financing that is commonplace throughout Europe, whereas normally in France everything is publicly financed.

"We had to convince the state and local administrators that this new type of vision was the right one. We delivered the project on time and on budget."

Aulas has bragged that the new set-up will see a massive hike in revenues for Lyon, from €21m a year in the old Stade de Gerland to €100m a year in the new stadium. However, the OL Group, the ▸

> "A big club defines itself not only by its performances on the pitch, but by its performance off it too"
>
> **Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas**



Stunning...Lyon fans watch their team christen the Parc OL with a 4-1 win over Troyes

Bright start...Jordan Ferri (right) celebrates scoring against Troyes with Corentin Tolisso

publicly quoted consortium of investors in the project, is being a little more circumspect, suggesting revenue will be at least €70m a year after five years.

While the money has been raised differently, there's still no doubt that the path from fantasy to reality was smoothed considerably by France's general desire to see its football stadiums brought up to scratch as the country pitched to host the 2016 European Championship. A new stadium in Lyon was one of the cornerstones of the bid, and after France was awarded the tournament in May 2010, Aulas's project was always going to be that much easier to deliver.

Roaring success...Lyon's mascot welcomes fans

Nevertheless, Aulas deserves credit for having the guts to take up the challenge. But he has always dared to dream big. It's no coincidence that the new stadium has been given a Category 4 UEFA classification, which means Aulas can now try to bag a Champions League Final. And why not? With its perfect views of an equally perfect pitch, 6,000 VIP places in 105 boxes and impressive Wi-Fi connectivity, this is a ground that has nothing to fear from any of Europe's best stadiums.

Of course, all that was needed for the first-ever game at Parc OL was a win.

On paper it looked like it might be easier said than done as Lyon went into the game against Troyes on the back of a miserable end to 2015 that had seen a six-game run of five defeats and a draw. During the traditional winter break Aulas said goodbye to coach Hubert Fournier, opting to install Bruno Genesio in the hot seat in his place. Genesio is Lyon through and through, having made over 170 appearances between 1985 and 1995 before joining the coaching staff in 2006. The coach was every bit as moved as the president by the new setting for his team to perform in.

"I'm so proud," said Genesio. "You have

Support...the home fans make the opening night at Parc OL a colourful occasion

> "You have the feeling that you're in a really enclosed space, even though the ground is massive. It's incredible"
>
> **Lyon coach Bruno Genesio**

the feeling that you're in a really enclosed space, even though the ground is massive. It's incredible. The players were like kids opening their Christmas presents!"

The biggest present was reserved for the 55,169 fans who showed up, as Lyon turned on the style in a 4-1 win that included spectacular goals from Rachid Ghezzal and Jordan Ferri. It was a win that lifted Lyon up to sixth in Ligue 1; Aulas's smile could be seen all the way up in Paris.

This is just the start of the journey, of course. If Aulas is to make his massive stadium gamble pay off, then Lyon need to get back to the glory days of the last decade when the likes of Karim Benzema, Juninho, Cris, Sidney Govou, Florent Malouda and Gregory Coupet saw them dominate domestic football and stamp their mark on the European game.

Genesio has welcomed Brazilian defensive stalwart Claudio Cacapa back to the club as part of his coaching team, and he hopes that will only increase the feel-good factor.

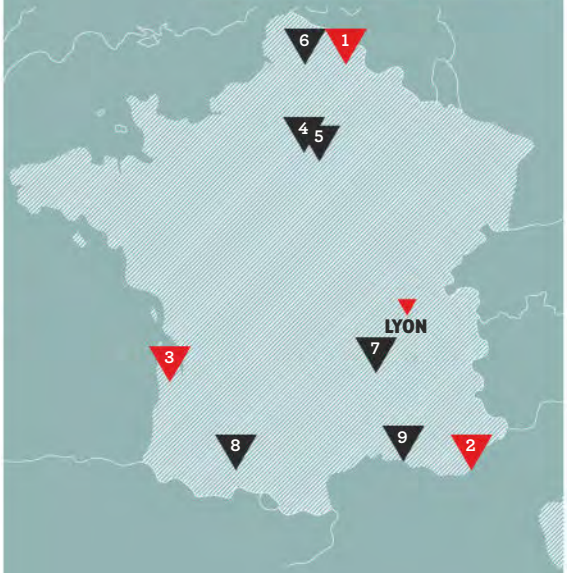
Lyon aren't exactly Paris Saint-Germain just yet. But, with their fantastic new stadium, they may soon offer some stiffer competition to Ligue 1's runaway leaders. And that can only be a good thing. WS

France's new grounds for Euro 2016

STADE PIERRE-MAUROY, LILLE
1 Opened in 2012 at a cost of €282m and with a 50,157 capacity, Lille's home was the first all-new ground to open its doors ahead of the 2016 Euros. Sadly, the team have yet to deliver a trophy.

ALLIANZ RIVIEIRA, NICE
2 The new home of Nice opened its doors in September 2013 after a two-year build that cost €245m. It has seen an upturn in the team's fortunes, while also hosting rugby matches for Toulon.

STADE MATMUT ATLANTIQUE, BORDEAUX
3 Owned by the city of Bordeaux, the 42,115-capacity arena cost €183m to build and has been home to Bordeaux since it opened its doors less than a year ago, in May 2015.



THE OTHER GROUNDS THAT WILL HOST MATCHES ARE
4 Parc des Princes, Paris
5 Stade de France, Paris
6 Stade Bollaert-Delelis, Lens
7 Stade Geoffroy-Guichard, Saint-Etienne
8 Stadium Municipal, Toulouse
9 Stade Velodrome, Marseille

eyewitness

Sid Lowe reports from Madrid

SPAIN

All hail 'Zizou'

Real Madrid turn to former hero as Rafa Benitez is airbrushed aside after seven months as coach

Spoiler alert! The game was given away when Zinedine Zidane's wife Veronique and four sons walked into the room at the Santiago Bernabeu and occupied seats in the front row. Then, just in case anyone still had any doubts, a few minutes later Zidane himself came in with Real Madrid's president Florentino Perez and sat down with them. To either side of them were the board of directors. Most of them, anyway. Some had chosen not to be there. Perhaps some were uncomfortable with what was about to unfold.

It was a Monday night and Rafael Benitez had not yet been sacked as Real coach. In fact, it was just 13 days since Perez had described him as the "solution" and insisted: "Zinedine Zidane will not replace Rafa Benitez". But most suspected that the president, who famously answered "never, never, never" when he was asked if he was going to sign David Beckham, was not telling the truth. They knew that what Perez said wasn't going to happen, was exactly what was about to happen.

Zidane was sitting there, waiting to take over and there was no sign of Benitez. According to sources close to Benitez, he had not even been told. But if he did not know that he was now the ex-Madrid boss, everyone else seemed to. The news had broken early in the afternoon and, after a long wait, with camera crews camped outside in the cold, a press conference was called for 7.30pm.

Six weeks earlier, after Madrid had been beaten 4-0 in the *classico* by Barcelona, Perez had called a media conference to deny reports that he was planning to sack Benitez, decrying a "clear campaign" to "destabilise" the club.

"Rafa has just started his work, let him work. He needs time," Perez said. Yet now he had been sacked seven months after taking over. At his presentation, Benitez had been told: "This is your home". Now much the same line was used on Zidane.

"We have taken a difficult decision,

Family gathering... Zinedine Zidane with his wife, four sons and Real president Florentino Perez

Start...Raphael Varane is dominant in the air during the 5-1 win over Sporting Gijon

especially for me, to resolve Rafa Benitez's contract," Perez announced flatly. "He is a great professional and a magnificent person, and we wish to express our gratitude for the work he has done over these months." And that was it. In two sentences, Benitez was gone. He was forgotten as quickly as if he had never been there at all.

The press had been called, but they were not allowed to ask questions – something they were told after they had arrived. There were no explanations for the sacking nor any information offered as to the agreement reached to rescind Benitez's contract, nor indeed if an agreement had been reached. No accusations or awkward questions,

Axed...Rafael Benitez is said to have alienated many of the players

no shared responsibility. The Rafa Benitez era was over.

There was barely a pause before Perez announced that, yes, the new coach was the man sitting in the front row. Zidane became the 15th manager that Real Madrid have had since 2003.

"I want to announce that we have decided to name Zinedine Zidane as our new coach. He is without doubt one of the greatest figures in the history of football," Perez said. "He knows better than anyone what it means to be at the head of Madrid's first-team squad. He knows how hard this challenge is but how exciting too.

"And he knows a lot of the players too from the 10th European Cup."

Perez invited Zidane onto the stage and

the Frenchman gave a short, haltering, timid speech thanking everyone. "Work begins tomorrow," he said. There was applause from the seats where the directors sat and Zidane and his family posed for photos. The following day's front pages were secure. Rafa who?

Zidane was presented the following afternoon at the Bernabeu, alongside the director of institutional relations, Emilio Butragueno. This time there would be questions, but not for Perez.

When Butragueno was asked for an explanation for the sacking, to talk through the reasons, he replied: "That doesn't matter...what matters is the man sitting next to me." Of Zidane, he added: "All I can say is that we're delighted he's the new coach and we trust in him. A new chapter has opened, with a lot of *ilusion*."

> "That doesn't matter, what matters is the man sitting next to me"
>
> **Emilio Butragueno prefers media questions about Zidane rather than Benitez's sacking**

Ilusion was the word that summed it up: enthusiasm, hope, excitement, dreams. And although there had been some initial reluctance from the board to put Zidane in charge, his arrival changed the atmosphere entirely.

The Bernabeu instantly felt like a different place, which had of course been the intention. The doubts about Zidane's lack of experience were eclipsed by the excitement that surrounds him. Zidane, scorer of that amazing 2002 Champions League-winning goal, the most galactic of the galacticos, elegance personified, was now the boss. A poll in one newspaper had already shown, before Benitez's sacking, that over 70 per cent of supporters wanted him in charge.

His first training session was an annual event, an open session attended by fans to celebrate "*Reyes*", Spain's equivalent of Christmas Eve, when the three kings supposedly reached Bethlehem with gifts. Five thousand fans came and chanted Zidane's name.

His first game in charge, against Deportivo La Coruna, was similar. Zidane shirts were sold in the club shop – with the number five he used to wear, the only one not occupied by a member of the first-team squad – and when the PA announcer read out the teams and coaches, his name was greeted by a huge roar.

Many of the players felt much the same way. The relationship with Benitez was far from fluid and some had agitated for his sacking. As early as pre-season, one dressing-room heavyweight had described him simply as "lamentable".

Zidane's arrival changed the environment and left them without an excuse to hide behind. They could no longer complain at a coach who hadn't played the game telling them what to do. Here was a man who knows. A man who knows what they are like. They started to enjoy life a little more.

When Benitez was sacked not one player offered any kind of public thanks or apology, not even a passing act of politeness. The contrast with Carlo Ancelotti was striking. Back then, players had been gushing in their praise, sorry to see him go. That had been part of the key: they had loved Ancelotti and whoever followed him was likely to face a difficult task. Benitez played the role of wicked stepmother. And rather than try to win the children's love, he tried to discipline them.

Close up...Zidane gets his message to Marcelo

Benitez had been a tough disciplinarian, one many players found heavy going and didn't understand. Even those who recognised that the work was good didn't necessarily warm to him. He was not helped by the club. Like every coach, he found his position undermined, an authoritarian without authority. He made compromises that he normally would not, accepting impositions that he might have thought protected him but only weakened him. He did not even die with his ideas; he died with someone else's.

Zidane was much more like Ancelotti. A man of quiet charisma, popular power, status, and much more their kind of coach. He'd played with captain Sergio Ramos, was assistant to Ancelotti when Madrid won the European Cup, and had a role that meant a lot of one-on-one work with the players. He was close to them. "It's an important point. I know the dressing room; I was with them with Ancelotti," Zidane said. "The most important thing is to have a good relationship with the players."

After the game against Sporting Gijon, Isco admitted: "We understand him more than Benitez", while Cristiano Ronaldo said: "We feel more empathy with him."

Madrid had just produced arguably their best display of the season, against Sporting Gijon. "So happy," ran the cover of *Marca*. "Perfection exists," said *AS*. It was an exaggeration, sure, but it was also understandable.

They had beaten Depor 5-0 and Gijon 5-1, scoring 10 goals in two games with Zidane. Under Benitez they had scored 10 in one game, against Rayo Vallecano.

However, this was different. Everything was different. WS

Welcome...a scarf hails the new coach

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eyewitness

Rumen Paytashev reports from Sofia

BULGARIA

Domestic game is beyond a joke

Litex are kicked out of the league after players refuse to finish game against Levski

Not for the first time, Bulgarian football finds itself a laughing stock after four-time champions Litex Lovech were expelled from the top flight after their players left the pitch in protest over refereeing decisions during a game against Levski Sofia on the last weekend before the league's winter break.

Amid accusations of a pro-Levski bias among the domestic game's hierarchy, reigning champions Ludogorets – who went into the break joint top with Levski – threatened to pull out of the competition in support of Litex.

And if things weren't farcical enough, Levski themselves even launched a campaign for Litex to be reinstated after realising that they could lose the seven points accrued in two victories and a draw against the team from Lovech this season.

The problems all stem from the game at Levski's Stadion Georgi Asparuhov in Sofia on December 15.

Four days earlier, Litex had beaten Levski in the quarter-finals of the Bulgarian Cup, winning 3-0 in extra time despite having a player sent off in a feisty affair that their boss Ljupko Petrovic – who was a European Cup-winner with Red Star Belgrade in 1991 – called the most dramatic match of his coaching career.

It was to be, however, a mere taster of what was to come...

It took just eight minutes for referee Georgi Yordanov to brandish a first card in the league clash, showing Veselin Minev of Levski a yellow for shoving Colombian striker Danilo Asprilla to the ground. Seven minutes later, the first red of the game appeared, with Litex's Norwegian striker Bjorn Johnsen receiving his marching orders for kicking Miguel Bedoya.

Despite their numerical disadvantage, the visitors managed to take the lead through Asprilla after 20 minutes as tensions steadily increased. Then, in the final minute of the first half, the ref awarded Levski a penalty and produced a second red card after Litex defender Rafael Perez clashed with Bedoya.

Play was delayed for several minutes as the visitors' remaining nine players surrounded the match officials, before Litex's sporting director, Stoycho Stoilov, walked onto the pitch and gestured to his players to return to the dressing room.

With Litex refusing to continue, the game was abandoned and Stoilov later explained: "I ordered the players to leave the pitch because I was provoked by these corrupt referees. From the beginning, the referee had different criteria.

"Such kinds of referee I haven't seen in football. These players can beat Levski with 10 men, as they did several days ago in the Cup. I am not a lawyer and I really don't know what will be the punishment. Today was the pick of the whole absurd situation in Bulgarian football."

Club president Trifon Popov agreed, saying "there was no sense to continue the game", while Petrovic claimed: "I don't know who gave this order, I am just a coach. My players wanted to continue the match. Today football was not a winner; this was the black side of football."

Initially, Litex received little sympathy from their hosts, who were awarded a 3-0 victory by the Bulgarian Football Union (BFU), with Levski sporting director Georgi Ivanov arguing: "It was bad that Litex abandoned the match. The people came to the stadium to watch football, but Litex interrupted the game in a criminal way which was unfair to the fans. There are regulations in football, which must be kept."

The mid-season break began two days

Photo: LAPbg

Seeing red...Litex's Rafael Perez (centre) is sent off

Photo: LAPbg

Controversy...Stoycho Stoilov calls his Litex players from the pitch

> "Today was the pick of the whole absurd situation in Bulgarian football"
>
> **Litex sporting director, Stoycho Stoilov**

after the game in Sofia, with Ludogorets ahead of Levski on goal difference. But the league leaders felt it was time they spoke out against what they saw as favouritism from officials. Owner Kiril Domuschiev said: "If there continues to be this tendency to support Levski to become champions, I will take Ludogorets out of the first division."

Litex have been expelled from the first division and will start next season in the second tier, while a 3-0 victory was initially awarded to Levski, leaving the capital club on 38 points, along with Ludogorets.

However, it was then pointed out that, according to league rules, if a team is taken out of the first division before the end of the "first season" – which means the last round of 2015 – all matches of that team are cancelled.

Should that be deemed the case in this instance, the biggest losers would be Levski. If Litex's results are scratched, Ludogorets would have 36 points, with Levski five points adrift on 31 points in second place.

Ivo Tonev, who is one of Levski's co-owners, was quick off the mark in an attempt to avert such a situation.

"We want the champion of Bulgaria to be decided on the pitch, but not in some room," he said, trying to justify his club's new standpoint. "We want a strong first division with Litex and CSKA [who are in the third tier after being expelled over their finances] quickly back among the big clubs."

Two days before Christmas, BFU ExCo vice-president Yordan Letchkov said "we are looking for a way to save Litex" and committee member Petar Velichkov called the club's punishment "a brutal decision".

However, any hopes of a reprieve ended in January as the club's expulsion was confirmed. "We all wanted Litex to stay. We tried to find a loophole to make this possible but we cannot break our own rules. There was no way to do it," BFU president Borislav Mikhailov said after an executive committee meeting.

While the decision of the BFU executive committee is final, Litex called the ruling "a hard blow" and issued a statement saying they "will fight to the end" and that they were considering taking the case to court.

With the league restarting in the middle of February, the BFU must now decide what to do about the points accrued by Ludogorets and Levski against Litex so far.

And then, after all that. there is the small matter of Litex's place in the semi-finals of the Bulgarian Cup... WS

SCHICKERIA
WÖRGL

It's Muller time

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

The Bayern Munich and Germany star may be in his prime, but not everyone was convinced he'd make it

Married to a talented equestrienne and a lover of horses himself, Germany and Bayern Munich attacking thoroughbred Thomas Muller was not always as universally revered as he is today. In fact, a few years ago he came very close to not making the professional grade at all in Bavaria.

In 2009, while playing for the club's reserve side, a deal was almost done to sell him to Hoffenheim. And it's fair to say that Bayern's coach at the time, Jurgen Klinsmann, would not have shed a single tear if he had left.

"Jurgen Klinsmann had made up his mind and told me there was no room for me in the first team," recalled Muller in an interview with *Kicker* magazine in 2013.

"Hermann Gerland [Bayern's long-serving youth coach] came out against

Timeline

AUG 15, 2008
Replaces Miroslav Klose as an 80th-minute sub for his Bayern Munich debut, in a 2-2 draw v Hamburg.

MAR 10, 2009
Plays his first Champions League game and scores the seventh goal as Bayern beat Sporting Lisbon 7-1.

OCT 21, 2009
Is sent off for the first time in his career as Bayern lose 2-1 away to Bordeaux in the Champions League.

MAR 3, 2010
Makes his international debut for Germany in a 1-0 defeat to Argentina in Munich.

the idea, plus Hoffenheim did not offer enough. The transfer window closed and I stayed put."

That was not the only time the wiry young local lad looked to be heading for the Bayern exit. In a decision that he is still trying to live down, FC Zurich president Ancillo Canepa ignored an opportunity to take Muller on loan, explaining: "We didn't want to bring in a player we had only looked at on DVD. Anyway, we were more interested at the time in a more bustling type of striker."

A few weeks later, in the 2009 close season, newly appointed Basle coach Thorsten Fink also made an attempt to take Muller to Switzerland, along with fellow Bayern second-stringer, defender Holger Badstuber.

"We were thinking about which Bayern academy products could help us push on and we identified those two," recalls Fink, who was a combative midfielder with Bayern when they won the Champions League in 2001. "They weren't getting a look in with Jurgen Klinsmann, so I got in touch with Hermann Gerland to ask if there was a chance of signing them. However, Bayern wouldn't let them go."

> "While you can rehearse certain moves on the training ground, it's often the case that I act on instinct. I have a feeling for space on the pitch"
> **Thomas Muller**

Also pursuing the pair at that time were the management at newly promoted Bundesliga outfit Freiburg. Reporters on the local newspaper, the *Badische Zeitung*, swear negotiations were so advanced that contracts had been drawn up, and sources at the Black Forest club have confirmed it. "It was one of those 'could, would or if' stories," smiles Freiburg press chief Rudi Raschke – and it certainly is an apt description, with the would-be buyers thinking they were home and dry, only for newly arrived Bayern coach Louis Van Gaal to pull the plug at the last minute.

Before agreeing to the sale, Van Gaal insisted on watching the two youngsters in training and he liked what he saw. He immediately made the pair first-team regulars in what was the first step in a breakthrough campaign of wall-to-wall achievements: the glory of a German league-and-cup double, a runners-up spot in the Champions League and ▸

MAY 1, 2010
Scores his first hat-trick and in so doing clinches the Bundesliga title for Bayern as they beat Bochum 3-1 at home.

MAY 15, 2010
Helps secure the double for Bayern as they beat Werder Bremen 4-0 in the German Cup Final.

MAY 22, 2010
Finishes on the losing side as Bayern are beaten in the Champions League Final in Madrid by Internazionale.

JUN 13, 2010
Scores his first international goal, on his World Cup debut, as Germany beat Australia 4-0 in South Africa.

JUN 27, 2010
Scores twice as Germany knock England out of the World Cup with a 4-1 win in Bloemfontein.

JUL 11, 2010
Finishes the World Cup as joint-top scorer with three other players on five goals, but wins the Golden Boot as he has more assists.

MAR 15, 2011
Gives Bayern the lead in the second leg but they are beaten in the Champions League by Internazionale, going out on away goals in the round of 16.

MAR 31, 2012
Plays his 100th Bundesliga game as Bayern win 1-0 at Nuremberg.

MAY 12, 2012
Finishes as a runner-up to Borussia Dortmund in the German Cup Final.

MAY 19, 2012
Scores the first goal in the Champions League Final against Chelsea in Munich, but Bayern are beaten on penalties.

prominence with the national side at the 2010 World Cup.

Winning his first cap for Germany a few months previously – in a 1-0 friendly loss to Argentina in March – Muller was a typical Van Gaal player. He was 19, confident, industrious and purposeful, always looking to make things happen and willing to follow match-day instructions to the letter.

Equally significant for LVG was the teenager's versatility. Muller's ability to fit snugly into any system and in any attacking role was just what his Dutch boss needed. Whether used on the right, left, as a central striker or in the hole, he brought urgency and ability to proceedings.

Renowned for promoting fledgling talent, Van Gaal did not deem it important that Muller lacked top-flight experience or that the Bayern attacking department was already stacked with such star names as Arjen Robben, Franck Ribery, Miroslav Klose, Mario Gomez, Luca Toni and Ivica Olic.

"With me, Muller always plays," Van Gaal famously declared that season. And he was not exaggerating, incredibly using him in all bar one of Bayern's 52 official games in 2009-10: a campaign in which the youngster scored 19 goals and made 16 assists.

Irascible, opinionated and in his element in a confrontation, Van Gaal might not be everyone's cup of tea, but he was undoubtedly the right coach at the right time for Muller.

"He was a special man and crucial to my career," said Muller of Van Gaal on a German TV show in 2014. "We had a special relationship and it really developed over the two seasons we were in tandem.

"When I was training badly, I'd often hear him shout: 'Thomas, should I take you off now?'"

On the surface, Muller might not have appeared particularly cut out for superstardom as he was pencil-thin, inelegant, and not exactly lightning quick or technically outstanding. However, an ordinary, everyman performer he plainly is not. Cunning, unpredictable and a phenomenal finder of space, Muller's shtick is to turn up where he is least expected, to look silently in the shadows for chinks in the opposition armour. And then explode into creative or goalscoring action.

"He's not orthodox in the way he plays," says Germany's national boss, Joachim Low. "Even I, as a coach, cannot explain the runs he makes. The lines he runs are not obvious at all.

"He has one aim and that is 'how can I score a goal?' He is very difficult to mark."

In an illuminating interview in January 2011 with the *Suddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper, Muller described his style of play as that of a "*raumdeuter*", a space interpreter. "While you can rehearse certain moves on the training ground, it's often the case that I act on instinct," he told *SZ*.

"I have a feeling for space on the pitch. I'm glad I have this ability. I've always had these skinny legs, but it's never been a problem. In fact, they probably helped me growing up at Bayern. You realise that you don't only have a body. You have to switch on your brain too."

His other great asset, of course, is his flair for putting the ball in the back of the net. In six full seasons in the Bayern first team, he averages no fewer than 21 goals per campaign in all competitions, already stands in the top five of the club's all-time scoring charts and has proved a heaven-sent finisher for Germany, notably earning the Golden Boot for his five goals at the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa and contributing five more to his country's

> "He was a special man and crucial to my career. We had a special relationship and it really developed over the two seasons we were in tandem"
>
> **Muller on his mentor, Louis Van Gaal**

Support...with wife Lisa before she competes at Munich Indoors in 2015

Special...Louis Van Gaal, who arrived at Bayern in July 2009, was the right coach at the right time for the young Thomas Muller

JUN 28, 2012
Comes on as a substitute in the semi-final of Euro 2012, but cannot help Germany to the Final as they lose 2-1 to Italy in Warsaw.

AUG 12, 2012
Scores Bayern's second goal in the 2-1 German Super Cup win against Borussia Dortmund.

OCT 20, 2012
Scores twice against Fortuna Dusseldorf as Bayern win 5-0 to set a Bundesliga record of eight successive wins at the start of a season.

APR 6, 2013
Helps Bayern to a 1-0 win away to Eintracht Frankfurt to secure the Bundesliga title in record time, with six games remaining.

APR 23, 2013
Scores two and makes one as Bayern beat Barcelona 4-0 in the Champions League semi-final first leg in Munich.

Committed...in action against Bayer Leverkusen in a German Cup quarter-final

triumph at Brazil 2014.

Although he was once coached during his academy years by legendary ex-Bayern and West Germany striker Gerd Muller, Thomas has a completely different playing style to his old trainer, who in the 1960s and 1970s was the supreme penalty-area poacher. But the pair undoubtedly have the same approach to finishing and are just as happy to force the ball home with a knee, thigh or chest as producing a bullet header or a crisp shot.

"Thomas was one of those players who even if playing badly could still come up with a goal," says Hermann Gerland. "His great strength is his feel for the game, his instincts. He always knew where he had to be positioned on the field.

"Putting the ball in the back of the net is the most important thing and he had

Child's play...Muller started out with TSV Pahl

that remarkable ability. He proved it in our youth ranks and has carried on doing so as a professional. He doesn't just pile up the goals against weaker teams. He especially comes to the fore in the big games.

"Whenever I used to contemplate substituting him, I'd straight away start to worry who would score the goals for us. It usually was the same story. Suddenly we'd score, I'd look to see who was responsible and it was Muller."

Born and brought up on the shores of Lake Amersee, to the south-west of Munich, Muller joined local club TSV Pahl as soon as he started infant school. By the age of nine he was more or less confronting opposing sides on his own, netting an amazing 120 goals in the 1998-99 campaign.

"That season we were Bavarian

MAY 25, 2013
Wins the Champions League with Bayern as they beat Borussia Dortmund 2-1 in an all-German Final at Wembley.

JUN 1, 2013
Scores the first goal for Bayern in their 3-2 German Cup Final win against Stuttgart.

AUG 9, 2013
Misses a penalty for the first time in his career as Bayern win their opening Bundesliga game against Borussia Monchengladbach.

DEC 21, 2013
Helps Bayern win the Club World Cup as they beat Raja Casablanca 2-0 in the Final in Morocco.

APR 29, 2014
Substituted in the Champions League semi-final as Bayern lose 4-0 at home to Real Madrid.

MAY 17, 2014
Scores in extra time as Bayern Munich record their 10th double by beating Borussia Dortmund 2-0 in the German Cup Final.

JUN 16, 2014
Scores the first hat-trick of the 2014 World Cup as Germany beat Portugal 4-0 in their opening game, in Salvador.

champions and Thomas was the leader of the team," remembers TSV coach Peter Hackl. "Not only did he score most of our goals, but also was a real personality. He was outstanding."

Just a couple of years later, the youngster would find himself among the chosen few at the Bayern academy – and according to the scout who initially spotted him, there never was any chance of letting him slip through the net.

"I first saw him when he was 11 and playing in an Upper Bavarian schoolboy tournament," says Jan Pienta, whose other Bayern discoveries include Bastian Schweinsteiger, Philipp Lahm, Holger Badstuber and Thomas Hitzlsperger.

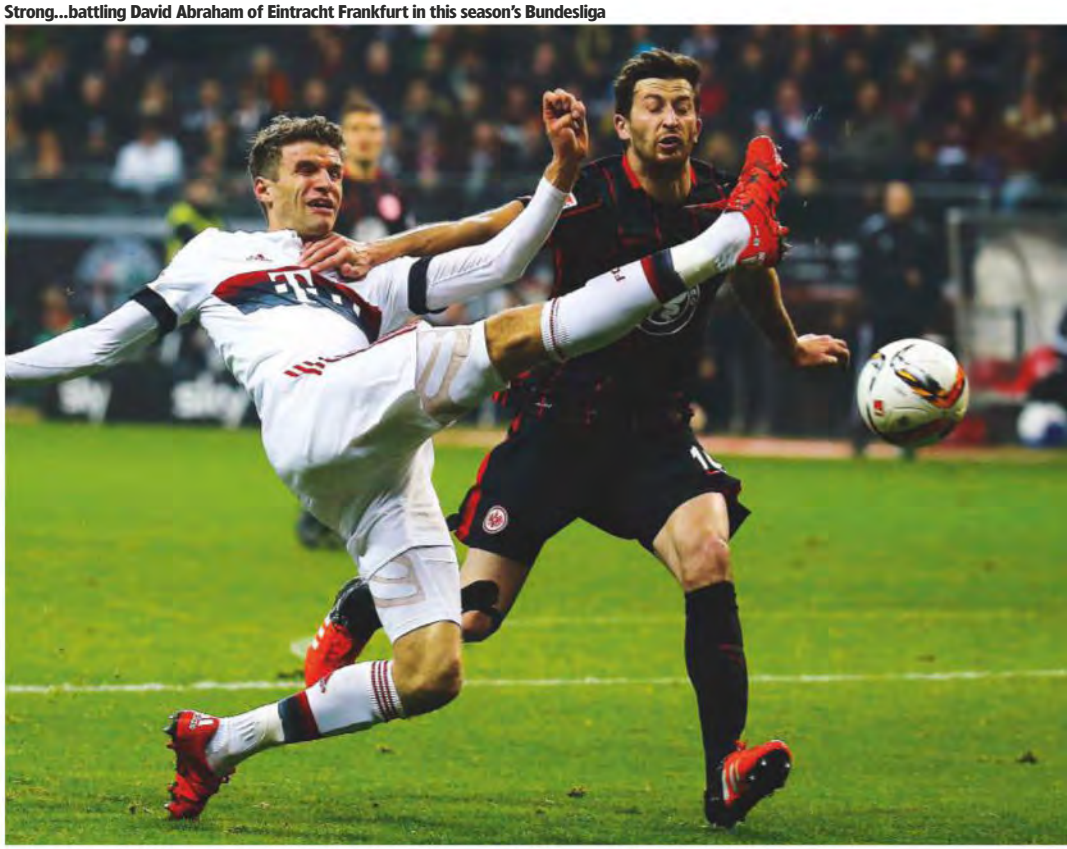
"He scored eight goals in one match. Impressive. I noticed his carefree spirit, uncommon willingness to get around the pitch and his directness.

"Those were the qualities which made him special."

For Pienta, one of the key ingredients in Muller's rise to fame is his fearlessness, and all through his career this insensitivity to pressure has served him extremely well. Whatever the stakes, he is never fazed. Not when making his first-team debut for Bayern back in August 2008. Not when forcing his way into Van Gaal's plans. Not when making the leap from raw national-team rookie to star of the 2010 World Cup finals.

If Pienta was the man who brought him to Bayern, it was the gruff, straight-talking Gerland who shaped his formative years at the club. While Muller provided the desire and the determination, the job of the former Bochum boss was to lay out the school of hard knocks syllabus: the discipline, moral bravery, work ethic and physical resistance.

Strong...battling David Abraham of Eintracht Frankfurt in this season's Bundesliga



> "His great strength is his feel for the game, his instincts. He always knew where to be positioned on the field"
> **Hermann Gerland on Muller**

Gerland has described Muller, now contracted to Bayern until 2021, as one of the most dedicated young players ever to cross his path and the pair remain very close to this day. But that's not to suggest that they always saw eye to eye.

"I used to call him 'Miss Muller' because he'd throw himself to the ground after every challenge," laughs Gerland, who is an assistant to Bayern coach Pep Guardiola these days. "I told him that the next time he went to ground, I'd call a helicopter to whisk him off. What happened? He gave it up. If he's fouled now, he stays on his feet."

Shortly after arriving at Bayern in the summer of 2009, Van Gaal was sitting in the club training ground canteen with Gerland. Spotting a figure at a nearby table, Van Gaal asked who it was.

"Don't you know?" retorted Gerland. "That's Jan Pienta, the guy who supplied us with all our weapons."

And no one fires more accurately than Thomas Muller. **WS**

Experience...Hermann Gerland is an assistant to Pep Guardiola at Bayern these days

JUL 8, 2014

Scores the opening goal of Germany's astonishing 7-1 win against hosts Brazil in the World Cup semi-final in Belo Horizonte.

JUL 13, 2014

Becomes a World Cup winner as Germany beat Argentina 1-0 in extra time in the Final at the Maracana stadium in Rio.

APR 21, 2015

Becomes the highest ever German goalscorer in Champions League history with a 36th minute goal in the 6-1 win against Porto.

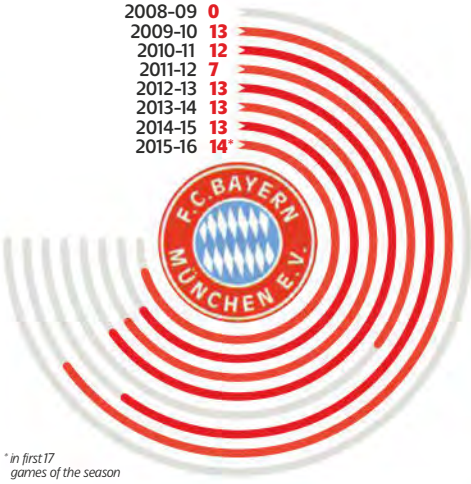
Thomas Muller

the numbers game

BEST EVER SEASON

Muller ended 2015 having set a personal scoring record for a top-flight campaign – with half the season still to go.

2008-09	0
2009-10	13
2010-11	12
2011-12	7
2012-13	13
2013-14	13
2015-16	14*



*in first 17 games of the season

€100m The fee Manchester United were reported to have offered in the summer for Louis Van Gaal's former protégé.

BAYERN'S ALL-TIME RECORD SCORERS

GERMANY

68

CAPS

GOALS

31

HONOURS

67

In the 67 Bundesliga games in which Muller had scored (from 2008 to 2015), Bayern had never lost, winning 64 and drawing three.

€15m *a year*

According to *Bild*, the new contract Muller signed in December 2015 made him the best-paid player in Bayern's history.

GAMES GOALS (*up to & including 21.01.16)

INCISA
1966
FIORENTINA
S.D. GRASSINA
FORZA M.GOMEZ
LIVERPOOL FC v ACF FIORENTINA
VERONA
GIVE UP
IMPAZZISCO PER TE!
MORTE NON CI SEPARERÀ
FIRENZE
CURVA
ULTRAS

WORDS: Paddy Agnew

The pride and the passion

Spiritual guidance or not, Fiorentina fans believe this could finally be their year

When, in November, Pope Francis became the first pontiff in 30 years to make a pastoral visit to Florence, the matter did not pass unnoticed among Fiorentina fans. How could it? After all, the centrepiece of his day was a public mass held in the Stadio Artemio Franchi, right under the Curva Fiesole – the historic stronghold of the most passionate of *La Viola* supporters.

In the days leading up to the Pope's visit, all manner of posters, messages and statements sprouted up around the Tuscan city. In one of them, the Fiorentina faithful urged Francis to "say a prayer for us and help us out with the *scudetto*". On another, somewhat irreverently, fans observed: ▸

Proud...fans on the Curva Fiesole get behind their team

"What a privilege for Pope Francis – to say mass in front of the Curva Fiesole."

Irreverent humour aside, the point is that these are heady days in Florence.

When Fiorentina took Internazionale apart with a 4-1 win at the San Siro in late September, the club went top of Serie A for the first time since February 1999. Those were the days when the fate of Fiorentina wrested on the shoulders of two legends of the post-war Italian game: coach Giovanni Trapattoni and Argentinian striker Gabriel Batistuta.

Florence has always held a very special place in the Italian football psyche. For a start, there are those – including Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini – who argued that the roots of modern-day football are to be found in *calcio fiorentino*, the 30-a-side unarmed combat that bore a vague resemblance to American football in that the aim was to get the ball over the opposition line. Versions of this game are still played today, although essentially as a tourist attraction.

Football historians tend to reject Mussolini's theory about the tenuous links between *calcio fiorentino* and the modern game, pointing out that it had much more to do with the English bringing it with them in the late 19th century as their ships docked in Livorno, Genoa, Naples and Palermo. Nonetheless, the great Renaissance city of Florence – which bore witness to the creative genius of Dante, Cimabue, Da Vinci, Michelangelo et al – still has a special relationship with football.

> "Fiorentina is an ordinary middle-range car up against the most powerful luxury vehicles. However, there is one thing about us: we have a lot of petrol in the tank"
>
> **Midfield playmaker Borja Valero**

Fiorentina is different from the clubs of other major Italian cities; not only because it represents a "cradle of culture" city but also because it is the city's only top-level team. The Internazionale-Milan, Roma-Lazio, Sampdoria-Genoa, Verona-Chievo, Juventus-Torino rivalries of elsewhere do not exist in Florence. Put simply, for the locals it is Fiorentina or nothing – which makes for a very passionate following.

As an example, some 30 years ago, the Curva Fiesole reacted angrily to ongoing tensions between the club and its star performer, Giancarlo Antognoni. With the club threatening to offload an injury-plagued player who was closing in on his 32nd birthday, the curva produced a banner one Sunday afternoon in January 1986 that read: "Dante 1302, Antognoni 1986. Florence you have learned nothing."

By comparing the player to Dante, the "Supreme Poet" and author of the *Divine Comedy* who was exiled from Florence in 1302 because of his embroilment in political wrangling with Pope Boniface VIII, Fiorentina fans demonstrated an acutely tuned historical memory and displayed support for a footballer they considered to be part of the city's rich creative tradition.

In recent times, that faithful following has not had a lot to shout about. Not long after the days when the Batistuta-Trapattoni side was battling for the title, the club went into financial meltdown, was relegated to Serie C2 and suffered the humiliation of losing its name and symbol. For the 2002-2003 season, the club

Top...the team celerate with their fans after the 4-1 win against Internazionale that put them top of Serie A

Special...Pope Francis arrives at the Stadio Artemio Franchi

played in C2 as "Florentia Viola". By the 2004-2005 campaign, the club not only had its name back but it had also made a lightning return to Serie A – thanks not only to on-field performances but also to what the Italian Football Federation defined as historical "sporting merits".

Key to the revival was fashion tycoon Diego Della Valle, the owner of luxury leather goods company, Tod's, who picked up the pieces in 2002 when the club collapsed after the 12-year ownership of cinema producers Mario and Vittorio Cecchi Gori.

Judged on the figures for 2014 – which showed Fiorentina returning an annual loss of €37million – it would seem that the Della Valle family continues to pick up the pieces.

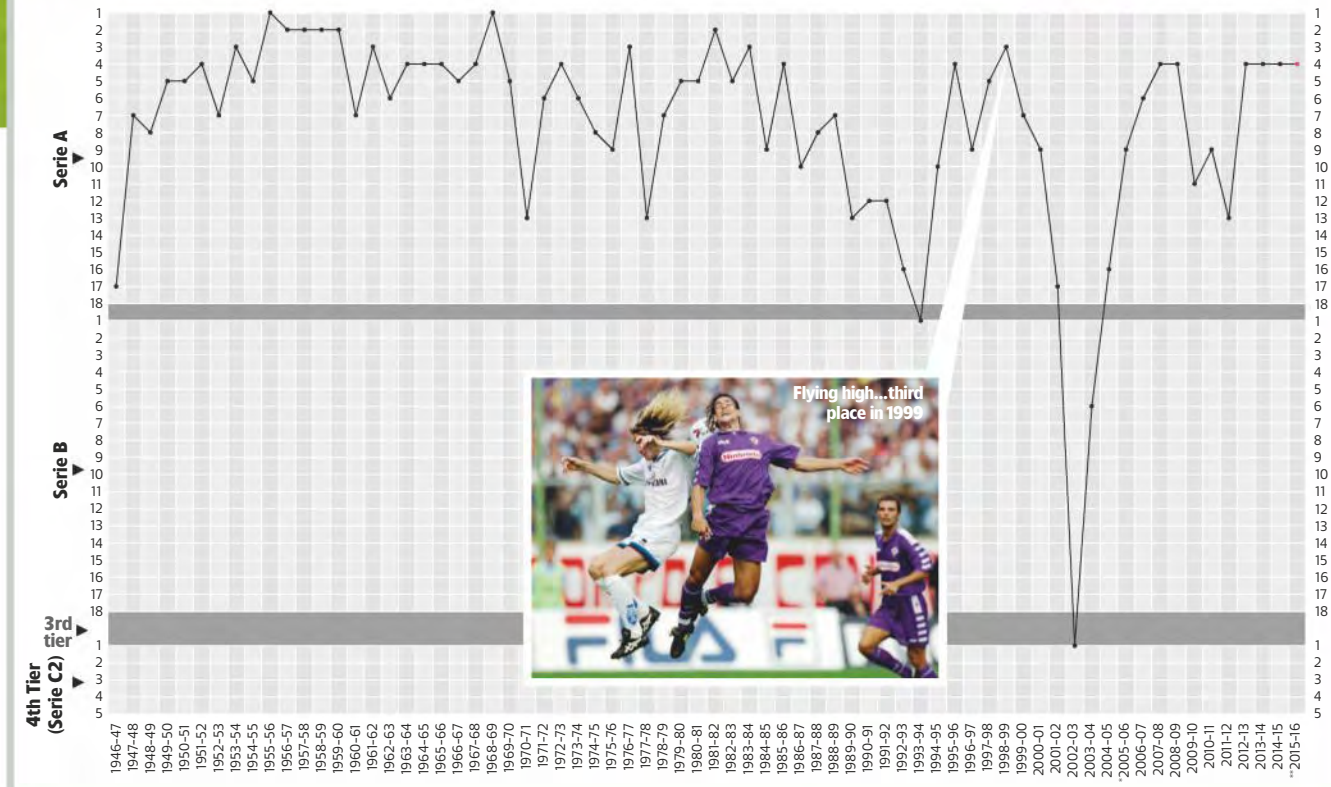
Could it be that in this, a 14th season at the helm, Della Valle – who according to Forbes has a net worth of $1.35billion – will finally see some significant success at his club?

In recent years, especially under coach Vincenzo Montella, the team has often played excellent, attractive football, but over the last 11 seasons their best finish has been fourth. They have had some good European moments, reaching a UEFA Cup semi-final in 2008 and the Europa League semi-final last season, but you have to go back to the 1990 UEFA Cup, when they lost to arch-rivals Juventus, for their last continental Final. And their ▸

***La Viola* hero...Argentina striker Gabriel Batistuta**

CUP-WINNERS

FIORENTINA POST-WAR LEAGUE POSITIONS



*finished fourth but were demoted to ninth place after the Calciopoli Scandal **as of ??.??.16

Talent...Khouma Babacar (centre) celebrates a goal against Carpi

one and only European title came in 1961, when they beat Scotland's Rangers 4-1 on aggregate to win the Cup-winners Cup.

This season certainly did not start off looking like it could finally be the one that saw a third league title come to Florence. Montella walked out to be replaced by a coach who not only came from a Swiss club but, much worse, had a distinguished past as a Juventus player no less.

When ex-Basle boss Paulo Sousa arrived in Florence the Portuguese was greeted with stadium posters which went from "Welcome to Hell" to "Hunchback Shit" – for Fiorentina followers, all Juventus fans are *gobbi* (hunchbacks) because of their excessive good luck. Furthermore, Sousa inherited a squad which had just lost important players, including Joaquin (Betis), Stefan Savic (Atletico Madrid), Neto (Juventus) and Mohammed Salah (returned to Chelsea and then loaned back out to Roma).

On top of that, Genk's 20-year-old Serb midfielder Sergej Milinkovic-Savic changed his mind after travelling to Florence to sign and put pen to paper with Lazio instead. At the time, he claimed he was honouring a previous promise to Lazio, but many saw his choice as a clear vote of no confidence in the new-look Fiorentina.

But after pre-season friendly wins against Barcelona and Chelsea, Sousa's Fiorentina opened their league camapign with a 2-0 home win over Milan and the bandwagon was well and truly rolling.

With Sousa proving himself to be perhaps the most elegant coach in Serie A, his side made a statement of intent in the San Siro against league leaders Inter.

Fiorentina's demolition job might have owed something to an uncharacteristic third-minute error from Inter's Slovenia goalkeeper Samir Handanovic, which saw him concede a penalty that was converted by his compatriot Josip Ilicic, but after 23 minutes Inter, who had conceded only once in five games, were 3-0 down. In the end, Fiorentina ran out ridiculously comfortable 4-1 winners to go top of the table.

Fiorentina remained in the top three for the rest of the year and led the table on five occasions, although there have been 2-1 defeats by Napoli and Roma, and an emphatic 3-1 loss to Juve. That defeat, in particular, seemed to indicate limitations in Sousa's attractive, smooth passing, *tiki-taka* game. Even though Fiorentina had 62 per cent possession, Juventus found the back of the net three times, while Fiorentina's only real shot on goal was Ilicic's early penalty.

> "Since the start they've been an important weapon for us. The city is very passionate and involved in the love for this shirt"
>
> **Fiorentina coach Paulo Sousa on the club's fans**

Sousa has built a splendid team at Fiorentina. Ciprian Tatarusanu is steady in ▸

Determined...Nikola Kalinic (in white) has been key for the club this season

THE POWER CURVE

The key figures behind Fiorentina

Andrea DELLA VALLE
The younger brother of Diego, he is the club's honorary president and is therefore the man who calls the shots. And also picks up the tab. A little-known public figure before the family took charge of Fiorentina in 2002, he has stuck doggedly with the task.

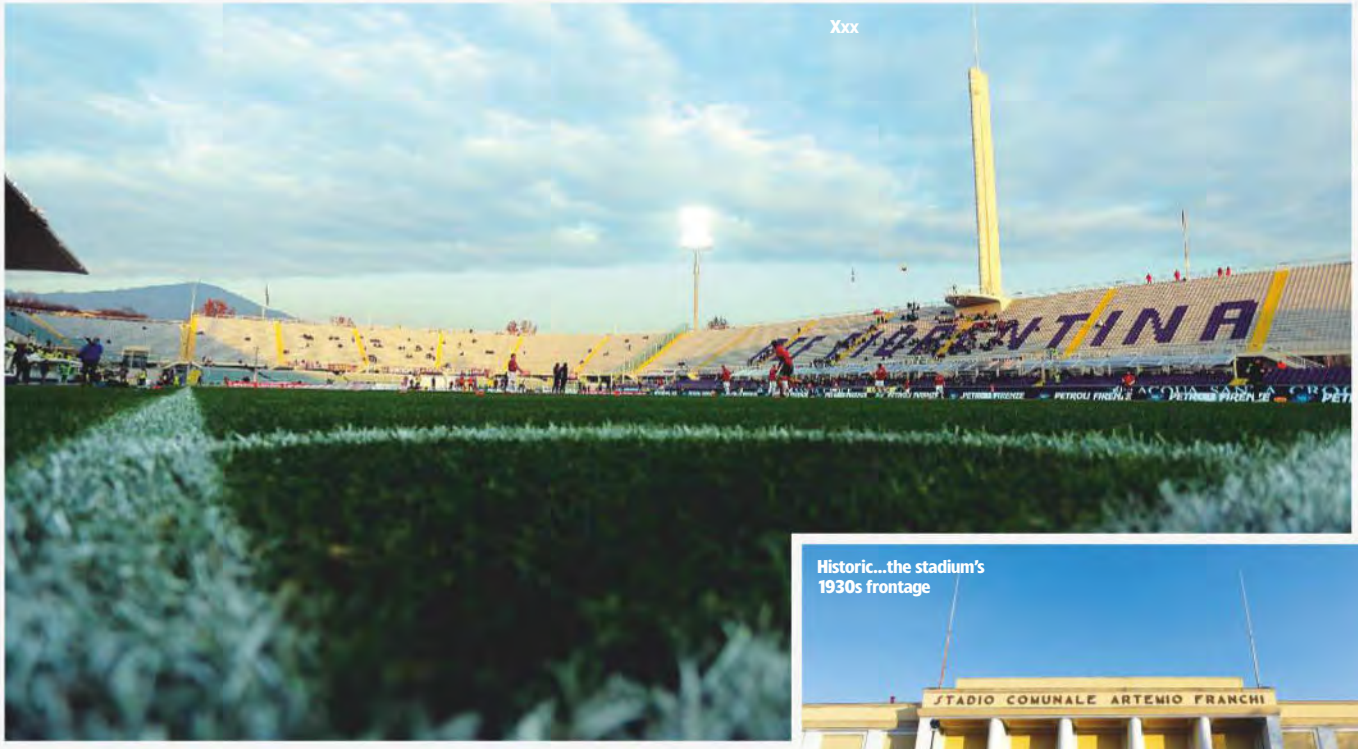
Daniele PRADE
The sports director is the club's key transfer-market man. Having worked with Fabio Capello's title-winning Roma, he joined the *Viola* in 2012 and is responsible for bringing in the likes of Facundo Roncaglia, Borja Valero and, most recently, Nikola Kalinic.

Mario COGNIGNI
Executive president who once said he only got the job because, of all the senior figures in the Della Valle group, he at least had some football experience, having been involved with his lovcal village team, Vis Civitanova.

Diego DELLA VALLE
Now 62, the shoe and leather entrepreneur bought the club in 2002 when they were in the fourth tier of Italian football. Ranked by Forbes as the country's 26th richest person.

Paulo SOUSA
The ex-Juventus man has won over the fans since being appointed coach and says of his side's title chances: "If you believe in yourself it helps. Hard work and a quality game lead to good results."

THE STADIUM



Historic...the stadium's 1930s frontage

Fiorentina's Stadio Artemio Franchi is a superb example of pre-war stadium architecture. The open-bowl arena, not far from Florence's historic centre, looks as stylish today as it did when completed in 1932.

Commissioned by Fiorentina's first president, Fascist politician Luigi Ridolfi, and devised by star architect Pier Luigi Nervi, the stadium was partly designed with the 1934 World Cup in mind. Italy was the favourite to get the vote when the stadium opened in 1931 with a curtain-raising friendly between Fiorentina and Admira Vienna.

Nervi's stadium still feels modern, with its graceful main stand and signature Marathon Tower. Back then, the capacity was officially 32,000 – although 43,000 crowded in for Italy's replayed quarter-final with Spain. In a nasty, physical match, a 1-0 win took Vittorio Pozzo's side to a semi-final with Austria. They went on to win the trophy in Rome.

Originally known as Stadio Comunale, it hosted one match for the European Championship of 1968, a 1-0 win for Yugoslavia over England, before being refurbished for the 1990 World Cup. This included a new lower tier and a sprucing up of Nervi's concrete. The Comunale never looked better, although fate decreed a tedious two-hour shut-out between Yugoslavia and Argentina.

Soon afterwards, the stadium took the name of former Italian FA and UEFA president Artemio Franchi, who died in a car crash near Siena. Both stadiums, in Florence and Siena, were renamed.

Current capacity is just over 47,000. Home fans occupy both ends, the north Curva Fiesole considered the home one. Opposite is the Railway End, the Curva Ferrovia, with away fans in sectors OS1-3 at the Ferrovia end of the Marathona, accessed through gates 13 and 14. The lower tiers of each sideline, Parterre di Maratona and Parterre Tribuna, are affordable for neutrals.

Peterjon Cresswell

Read more at worldsoccer.com

Open bowl...Stadio Artemio Franchi

Setting sun...Nightime at the Artemio Franchi

goal, while Gonzalo Rodriguez and Facunda Roncaglia, alongside Italy international Davide Astori, look solid in defence. In midfield, nippy Federico Bernardeschi is one of the revelations of the season, Matias Vecino is the perfect "hewer of wood and carrier of water", with Poland international Jakub Blaszczykowski adding a wealth of Bundesliga experience.

Playing in front – and sometimes behind them – is inspirational Spanish schemer Borja Valero, who along with the rejuvenated Ilicic supplies the ammunition for Croat striker Nikola Kalinic, who has been arguably their most important player so far this season.

Yet for all the quality of this team, the suspicion remains that Fiorentina may simply be too short on strength in depth to lift the league title. If one or two key players were to be injured, Sousa could well have difficulty replacing them.

If the title proves a step too far, a Champions League place with a top-three finish is not out of the question. Furthermore, having reached the semi-finals of the Europa League last term, they will fancy another long run in the competition – if they can first overcome Tottenham Hotspur in the round of 32.

The fans feel that this really could be Fiorentina's year. And with the backing of Pope Francis, who's to say it won't? WS

"He is a warrior who will not surrender, who is hard in the fight but is fair in the soul"

Words on the statue of Gabriel Batistuta outside the Stadio Artemio Franchi

Future...midfielder Federico Bernardeschi has been a relevation

THE COACH

Paulo SOUSA (Por)
Age 45 (30.08.70)
As a clever midfielder schemer he won the European Cup in 1997, with Borussia Dortmund, and 1996 with Juventus – an association which did not endear him to fans on arrival last summer. However, he has won them over with his intelligence, elegance and, above all, results. Has also coached in England, Hungary, Israel and Switzerland.

THE KIT

THE PURPLE SHIRT
As a club, Fiorentina have always been distinguished by their deep purple strip.

Legend has it that the colour was the result of a clothes-washing incident when their original red-and-white shirts – Florence's city colours – came out of a river wash looking more purple than anything else.

In reality, the purple – which was used for the first time in a September 1929 friendly against Roma – was chosen by the club's founder, Luigi Ridolfi Vay da Verrazzano.

The previous year, Fiorentina had played Hungarian side Ujpest in a friendly and the opponents' purple strip had greatly impressed Ridolfi.

He brought their kit home with him, tried it out and found that it met with immediate approval.

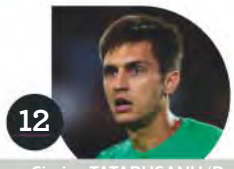
HOME KIT SECOND KIT

THE SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS

24 Luca LEZZERINI
Age 20 (24.03.95)
Highly rated youth-team product who made his Serie A debut for the injured Tatarusanu this season.

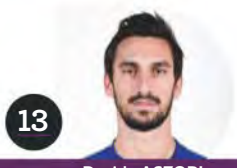
33 Luigi SEPE
Age 24 (08.05.91)
Former Italy youth international on loan from Napoli. Given his chance in Europa League this term.



12 Ciprian TATARUSANU (Rom)
Age 29 (09.02.86)
Arrived from Steaua Bucharest in 2014 and now first choice. Romania's player of the year and a key figure in the Euro 2016 qualifiers.

DEFENDERS

28 Marcos ALONSO (Spa)
Age 25 (28.12.90)
Former Real Madrid, Bolton and Sunderland left-back. Grandfather Marquitos was a member of Real Madrid's all-conquering 1950s side.



13 Davide ASTORI
Age 29 (07.01.87)
Left-sided, solid centre-back on loan from Cagliari who picks up plenty of cards. Ten Italy caps and played at the 2013 Confederations Cup.

3 GILBERTO (Bra)
Age 22 (07.03.93)
Right-back who has not had many opportunities since arriving from Botafogo last summer.

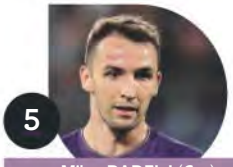
23 Manuel PASQUAL
Age 33 (13.03.82)
Veteran left-back and dead-ball specialist. Ten Italy caps. Wears Steven Gerrard's captain's armband as a salute to the former Liverpool man.

2 Gonzalo RODRIGUEZ (Arg)
Age 31 (10.04.84)
Centre-back signed from Villarreal in 2012, along with Borja Valero. Seven Argentina caps and a regular goal threat at set-pieces.

32 Facundo RONCAGLIA (Arg)
Age 28 (10.02.87)
Centre-back or right-back signed from Boca Juniors in 2012 and established as a regular in the back three. Argentina international.

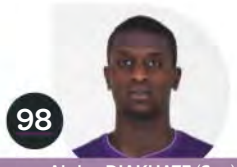
4 Nenad TOMOVIC (Ser)
Age 28 (30.08.87)
Serbian international centre-back who arrived from Genoa in 2012. Wears the name "Nenad" on the back of his shirt.

MIDFIELDERS



5 Milan BADELJ (Cro)
Age 26 (25.02.89)
Hard grafter and central midfield regular this season following a summer 2014 move from Hamburg. Set for Euro 2016 with Croatia.

16 Jakub BLASZCZYKOWSKI (Pol)
Age 30 (14.12.85)
Right winger who joined on loan from Borussia Dortmund last summer. Revived his career in Florence and will be key for Poland at Euro 2016.



98 Abdou DIAKHATE (Sen)
Age 17 (31.12.98)
Tall, powerful midfielder dubbed the "new Pogba" by *Gazzetta dello Sport* after being discovered in park football. Yet to make first-team debut.

14 Matias FERNANDEZ (Chl)
Age 29 (15.05.86)
Free-kick specialist, nicknamed "Matigol". Missed the 2014 World Cup through injury but a member of Chile's 2015 Copa America-winning side.

72 Josip ILICIC (Sln)
Age 28 (29.01.88)
Thriving under Paulo Sousa this season, scoring nine goals in the first half of the Serie A campaign. Joined from Palermo in 2013.

18 Mario SUAREZ (Spa)
Age 28 (24.02.87)
Switched from Atletico Madrid last summer, with Stefan Savic going the other way, but has found his starting opportunities limited.

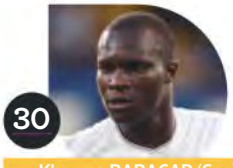
20 Borja VALERO (Spa)
Age 31 (12.01.85)
Schemer and vital cog in the *Viola* machine as Sousa's "eyes on the pitch". Formerly with Mallorca, West Brom and Villarreal. One Spain cap.

8 Matias VECINO (Uru)
Age 24 (24.08.91)
Starred for Maurizio Sarri's Empoli last season and Sarri wanted to take him to Napoli in the summer but he has repaid Fiorentina's faith in him.

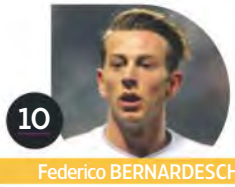
21 Joan VERDU (Spa)
Age 32 (05.05.83)
Playmaker and ex-Barcelona trainee. Surprise signing last summer after a year in the UAE. Previously with Deportivo La Coruna, Espanyol and Betis.

77 Oleksandr YAKOVENKO (Ukr)
Age 28 (23.06.87)
Former Anderlecht winger who has had few opportunities in Florence. His father Pavlo is a former USSR international.

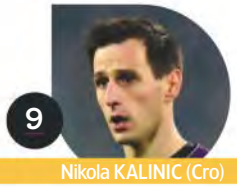
FORWARDS



30 Khouma BABACAR (Sen)
Age 22 (17.03.93)
Powerful centre-forward who made his Fiorentina debut at 16. Showed early promise when scoring 21 goals on loan at Modena.



10 Federico BERNARDESCHI
Age 21 (16.02.94)
Speedy, versatile under-21 winger or midfielder who is enjoying a fine season.



9 Nikola KALINIC (Cro)
Age 28 (05.01.88)
One-time Blackburn Rovers reject was a Europa League finalist with Dnipro last year.A revelation since joining *La Viola* for €5.5m in the summer.

22 Giuseppe ROSSI
Age 28 (01.02.87)
American-born striker and one-time Manchester United trainee who has battled serious knee injuries over the past two seasons.

7 Mauro ZARATE (Arg)
Age 28 (18.03.87)
Signed from West Ham United in January for £1.6m, after spells in Serie A with Lazio and Internazionale. An Under-20 World Cup winner in 2007.

(All ages as of 29.02.16)

6 of the best

Unsung stars of the Champions League

Nick Bidwell profiles players to look out for when the knockout stage begins

1 Diego GODIN

ATLETICO MADRID

Courage, Heart and Head. Atletico's ultra-reliable Uruguayan central defender and set-piece threat could not have chosen a more apt title for his recently published biography. Earning his keep in Spain for the past eight-and-a-half seasons – three at Villarreal and since July 2007 with the "*Rojiblancos*" – the 30-year-old seems to improve with every passing year and can always be counted upon to vigilantly mind the store on white-hot European nights. No other member of the Atletico squad better embodies the gutsy, wholehearted philosophy of club coach Diego Simeone: the never-say-die spirit, the pronounced work ethic, the sheer ruthlessness. Gives every impression that he was born to mark a centre-forward, but in reality he began his career as a midfielder at Montevideo club Cerro.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE
Round of 16

GENT	v	WOLFSBURG
ROMA	v	REAL MADRID
PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN	v	CHELSEA
ARSENAL	v	BARCELONA
JUVENTUS	v	BAYERN MUNICH
PSV	v	ATLETICO MADRID
BENFICA	v	ZENIT
DYNAMO KIEV	v	MANCHESTER CITY

2 Andriy YARMOLENKO

DYNAMO KIEV

Although the goal-hungry winger or second striker has some way to go before joining such all-time Dynamo greats as Oleh Blokhin, Viktor Kolotov, Anatoliy Demyanenko and Andriy Shevchenko in the club's Hall of Fame, he is undoubtedly moving in the right direction. Now 26, the homegrown star has been a club talisman for a good half-dozen years and if Kiev are to have any hope of upsetting Manchester City in the round of 16, he will have to put their occasionally careless back line under pressure – a more than realistic mission for someone with his two-footed skills and jaw-dropping game-changing brilliance. Under contract until 2020 but still has his eye on a big-money move to western Europe.

3 Sven KUMS

GENT

Gent's remarkable success of the last 18 months – their first Belgian league title and qualification for the Champions League knockout phase – has essentially been a triumph of a meticulously organised collective unit. But they do have exceptional individuals. Their 28-year-old skipper, for one, is a deep-lying midfield regulator of the highest calibre, and without his heads-up awareness, flair for dictating the tempo, accurate long or short passing game and industry, the "Buffalos" simply would not be the same. A wonderful conductor of the orchestra, he can turn a meandering passage of play into a lightning attack with just a touch or two. Currently the best player in Belgium and tipped to soon make his international debut, he has come a long way since failing to make the grade at Anderlecht a decade ago.

4 Kostas MANOLAS

ROMA

A persistent rumour is doing the rounds that wherever Pep Guardiola coaches next season, the Greek centre-back will follow. And if the pair do link up, it could be a partnership made in heaven. Bought for €13million from Olympiakos in the summer of 2014, the 24-year-old is one of the few really outstanding stoppers in world football today. Combative, robust and commanding in the air, he is always switched on, comfortable on the ball and

5 Douglas COSTA

BAYERN MUNICH

Recently voted the most impressive performer of this term's "Autumn Championship" in his first campaign for Bayern following a €30million switch from Shakhtar Donetsk, the 25-year-old Brazilian winger has taken to the Allianz-Arena scene like a duck to water. And he has emerged as the team's prime creative source, setting up no fewer than 12 goals in the Bundesliga and two more in the Champions League last year. He is tricky, elusive, and pacy, but what stands out is his cool-headedness and selflessness in the danger zone, invariably preferring a pass to a wild stab at personal glory. Team-mate Thomas Muller describes him as a "rocket", and so he is – one with the most advanced guidance system.

very quick over the ground. One of his strongest suits is his effectiveness in recovery, and he offered a perfect illustration in a Champions League tie against Bayer Leverkusen in November, giving opposition attacker Karim Bellarabi a 20m head start and still managing to chase him down and execute a fine last-ditch tackle. The undisputed leader of the Roma back line, new boss Luciano Spalletti will be desperate to hang on to him.

6 Davy PROPPER

PSV

While the vast majority of Dutch pundits tend to exclusively attribute the strength of the PSV midfield to the dynamic and skilful Mexico international Andres Guardado, the contribution of the 23-year-old Propper often goes unnoticed. The former Vitesse central midfielder, who only joined PSV last summer, has settled in extremely well at the Philips Stadion and has risen to the challenge in the Champions League. Defensively solid, he is also adept at pushing forward and scored the late winner against CSKA Moscow that put PSV into the knockout stage. Made his full debut for Holland at the end of last season and should be one of the building blocks of the new and reconstituted *Oranje* line-up.

Retro forwards back in vogue

Jonathan Wilson explains why we are seeing a return to twin strikers

Threat...Leicester City strikers Jamie Vardy (centre) and Shinji Okazaki

This season's Premier League is one that would not feel out of place 30 years ago. The familiar stratification has broken down, even the best sides are inconsistent and it feels as though every round of games brings at least one major surprise.

Perhaps it's simply a freak, a rare coincidence of middling teams finding form and confidence just as the elite go through debilitating transitions.

Perhaps it is the shape of things to come, the saturation of television money meaning almost everybody is buoyant.

But there has also been an intriguing tactical shift, one that enhances the sense of this being a retro-season. There has been a return – at Leicester City and Watford most notably – of systems with twin strikers, something that runs contrary to the general trend first outlined by the great Dynamo Kiev coach Victor Maslov in the late 1960s. "Football," he explained, "is like an aeroplane. As velocities increase, so does air resistance, and so you have to make the head more streamlined."

That implies a linear evolution and, in the most general sense, that is how tactics have developed. When England played Scotland in the first international in 1872, they fielded seven forwards. Almost a century and a half later, in an age of false nines, it's not uncommon for teams to play without any out-and-out forwards at all.

It would appear that the process of streamlining has reached its end point. With football seemingly unable to go any further down this road, it is now heading in the one direction it can: backwards.

While not untrue, it is a simplified representation, leading from the invention of passing at Queen's Park through RS McColl to Newcastle United, through Peter McWilliam to Tottenham Hotspur, through Vic Buckingham to Ajax, through Rinus Michels and Johan Cruyff to Barcelona and Pep Guardiola is a beguiling one. But that is one part of the picture; the landscape is far more complicated than that.

Various claims have been made that Total Football was invented, not in Amsterdam in the 1960s but in Hungary in the 1950s or Sunderland in the 1930s or Leicester in the 1960s. On the one hand such claims are nonsensical, based on

Kings of possession... Barcelona's Andres Iniesta (left) and Xavi

Duo...Watford's Troy Deeney (left) and Odion Ighalo

partisanship and a failure to recognise that possession-based inter-movement is only part of what made Total Football so effective.

The co-ordinated pressing that made Ajax so devastating arguably wasn't even physically possible until the nutritional developments of the late 1960s. Tactically it's difficult to see how it could have functioned without the platform of a back four, which only became widely accepted in the early 1960s.

Great developments, however, very rarely spring fully formed from the mind of their creator.

Passing and moving was the first great tactical development, introduced by Scotland in that inaugural international, and was tried in increasingly adventurous deployments thereafter. Some worked and some did not, but it came to the fore when combined with the sort of ferocious pressing pioneered by Maslov at Dynamo and Michels at Ajax.

Tactical history is not simply the story of great men having great ideas in sequence; it is far more complex than that.

Much of the development is reactive. One team does a thing and their opponent tries to work out a way of countering it. For a time, five years or so ago, Barcelona-style possession football held sway. Then it was realised that it could be neutered by sitting deep and absorbing pressure, with the ball becoming less important.

"*Gegenpressing*" and rapid transitions have become the fashionable way to play.

Why have twin strikers come back? Well, perhaps because a lot of defences had grown used to playing against a single striker. One centre-back marks and the other covers. The art of defending one-on-one was lost.

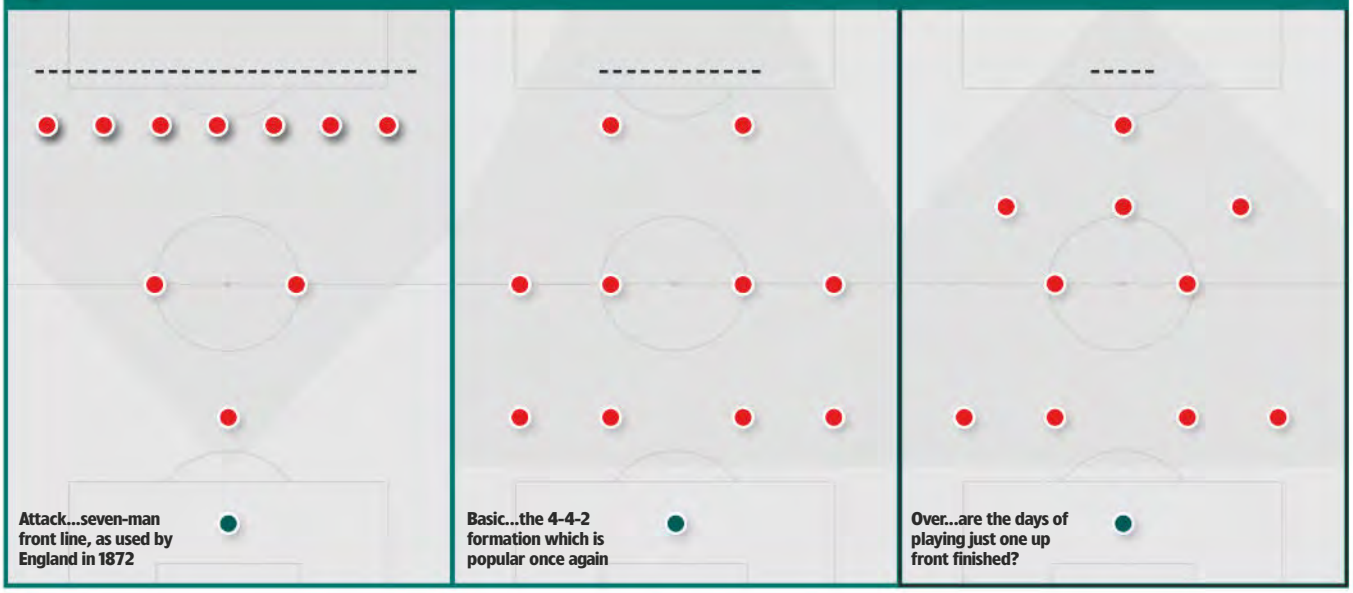
It's widely accepted there is a dearth of great centre-backs in the world at the moment and that may be a contributory factor. Play two strikers and make the two centre-backs defend.

If your style is to get the ball forward quickly, when is it easier to do that? With one striker to hit or two? Fielding two strikers still leaves the classic two banks of four to frustrate the opposition.

A 4-4-2 set-up is a simple, pragmatic way to play, and as expertise in dealing with it has waned so it has become more effective again. WS

> It's widely accepted there is a dearth of great centre-backs in the world at the moment...so play two strikers and make the two centre-backs defend

STREAMLINING THE FRONT LINE



Attack...seven-man front line, as used by England in 1872

Basic...the 4-4-2 formation which is popular once again

Over...are the days of playing just one up front finished?

PHILIPPE COUTINHO

"Under Klopp, we can express ourselves more naturally"

The 23-year-old Brazilian is adapting to a new regime at Liverpool and has his sights set on the Brazilian national team after missing out on the World Cup

Jurgen Klopp combined winning trophies with breathtaking football at Borussia Dortmund. How significant is it to your trophy ambitions to have him here at Liverpool?
He created a highly successful side at Dortmund and it is great for Liverpool to have him. In training, we are working hard and enjoying his methods, which are helping to make us better players. Little by little, it is translating to matches and I think everyone has seen how effective his [*gegenpressing*] philosophy can be if we adapt it in the right way. It feels like we are moving in the right direction under him and we believe we can fight for the big prizes and enjoy some special moments with the fans.

What influence has Klopp had on you in his time at Liverpool?
Our team is playing a high-pressing game and I am enjoying it. With this style there is more freedom when we have the ball. We still have responsibilities within the team, but the manager is asking us to play our game more naturally and it is enabling us to express ourselves. Klopp has put his ideas forward and they are helping to make me an even better player. I have been lucky to work under some fine managers already in my career and they have each added an element to my game. The likes of Benitez, Pochettino and Dunga are great coaches, but I will always have a special gratitude to Brendan [Rodgers]. He believed in me and brought me here. He gave me the opportunity to play for such a great club.

How important is your understanding with Roberto Firmino?
Our understanding is improving and I am learning more and more about the way he likes to play, as well as his movement off the ball. Hopefully that can be beneficial to both Liverpool and Brazil. He's a great player who brings a lot of quality into the squad, but it is not just about two players and a partnership. The whole squad is working to improve as our main objective is to win trophies as a unit.

English clubs haven't always taken the Europa League seriously, but now that the likes of Manchester United, Sevilla and Borussia Dortmund are involved, is it more appealing as a player?
You always want to test yourself against the best and there are some strong teams in the competition now, but that doesn't affect it as a target. Maybe that makes it more attractive to the fans, but for the players it was always something we wanted to take very seriously. The manager has emphasised that the Europa League represents a great opportunity for us and we are very focused on going as far in the competition as we can.

You've had some big moments in the past 18 months. What has been the highlight?
It is true that I have had some great moments, but I cannot rest, I always want more. I am driven to keep developing and improving. It was great to play at my first major tournament for Brazil, at last summer's Copa. It didn't turn out as we would have hoped, but it was a huge learning curve for me to play and train with the best Brazilian players of the moment. I was also nominated for awards and named in the Premier League team of the year, but I want more than that.

Do you feel the national side has seen the best of you yet?
I know I need to improve a lot and there is so much more I want to show and achieve with the national team. I am driven to keep improving and I am working hard to be the best I can be. If I keep developing and working on my game I hope that over the next few years I can serve my country as a great player and make some big contributions.

You have said that you were angry at not being involved in the 2014 World Cup. Does that spur you on?
Of course. Every player wants to play in a World Cup and unfortunately I was not involved. It was sad the way it turned out for Brazil in our home World Cup. It was disappointing for the players who were involved but we must look forward. It still remains my dream to play in a World Cup. It's definitely one of my major goals.

Does one day playing in La Liga – like your idol Ronaldinho and your good friend Neymar – interest you?
I just like to live in the moment. I am not looking ahead. Being here at Liverpool is a dream come true. I am already playing in the best league in the world and I have a number of years left on my contract that I only renewed last year. I am very happy and my focus is on helping Liverpool fight for trophies.

You played at various age levels with Neymar. Just how good is he and do you expect him to succeed Lionel Messi as the best player in the world one day?
Without a doubt. He's already among the three best players in the world, alongside Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. Everyone can see his qualities. He just keeps getting better and better. With every game he is able to express more and more of his natural gift. I always knew he was set for greatness. In the youth teams you could see he was special. We used to joke with him that he'd be the best in the world. It is not a surprise to any of us now because you could tell he was different.

Neymar said he'd like to see you at Barca...
It's flattering. It's great to hear this from someone who is not just a friend but is also one of the best players on the planet. Nobody knows what will happen in the future but, like I said, I'm happy at Liverpool and am really enjoying the moment.

Interview by Paul Hassall

"The manager is asking us to play our game more naturally and it is enabling us to express ourselves. Klopp has put his ideas forward and they are helping to make me an even better player"

Destination England

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

The announcement that the world's best coach is to leave Bayern Munich has sparked a flurry of speculation about his future

Due to soon embark on a sell-out tour of Premier League venues, Pep Guardiola is widely regarded as the planet's best coach and an object of desire for every leading club in Europe. Yet in Germany, where he is in his third and final season in charge of Bayern Munich, not everyone is quite so sure.

What counts at Bayern are the biggest prizes. And while Guardiola has achieved domestic dominance – two Bundesliga titles already in the bag and a third on its way – he still has to deliver in the Champions League, having been unable to prevent the Bavarians tasting bitter semi-final defeat against Real Madrid and Barcelona in each of the past two continental campaigns.

Off...Guardiola's next stop will be England

The risk-versus-reward equation he faces over the next four months is a simple one. Triumph in the Champions League and he assumes the mantle of Bayern immortal. Fail and expect to leave the Allianz-Arena by the back door, appreciated rather than revered.

In contrast to such Bayern coaching

greats as Udo Lattek, Ottmar Hitzfeld and Jupp Heynckes, Guardiola has never totally won over the club's supporters; nor has he established a Jurgen Klopp-like emotional connection with the fans. And bearing in mind the scintillating football he has served up with Bayern, it is the ultimate of ironies.

Under Guardiola, Bayern have become poetry-in-motion meets ruthless assassin. Despite his constantly whirling carousel of formations and personnel, the net result remains the same: a masterclass in fluidity, control, instant problem-solving and attacking panache. Blurred lines and refinement. Patience, precision and positional play of the highest order. A futuristic work of art if ever there was one. On occasion even approaching perfection.

No coach in world football today approaches his craft more profoundly than the ever-calculating Guardiola, who is exceptional in his powers of analysis, meticulous drilling of his team and in a class of his own when thinking his way through the evolving matchday battle.

> No coach in world football today approaches his craft more profoundly than the ever-calculating Guardiola

After more than two decades as a player and coach at Barcelona, his switch in 2013 to Bayern was always going to be something of a culture shock for the Catalan. But how well he has adapted to the physicality and dynamism of the German scene.

Although pressing and possession remain at the heart of his philosophy, these days he is much more likely to sanction the use of long, diagonal balls – mainly struck to order by centre-back Jerome Boateng – and following years of considering a genuine centre-forward as an antiquated irrelevance, he now swears by the outstanding Robert Lewandowski.

Hands on...consoling Jerome Boateng after a German Cup defeat

At Bayern, Guardiola has generally become more flexible in his approach, and on the evidence of this season he is finally getting to grips with one of his team's fundamental weaknesses: their vulnerability to the counter-attack.

Genius comes at a price, though, and it's fair to point out that not everyone who has crossed his path at Bayern has found it easy to work with him.

His relentless tactical demands can wear down even the most dedicated professional and a number of Bayern stars – among them Franck Ribery, Thomas Muller and Mario Gotze – are rumoured not to be on good terms with him, while the club's top brass have, at

Forward thinking...with Arjen Robben

WHERE NEXT?

After the announcement by Bayern that Guardiola will leave at the end of this season when his contract expires, the Spaniard revealed his desire to work in England.

"I want to coach in the Premier League," he told a press conference in early January. "That is the reason I did not prolong my contract.

"Three years are enough. I am not comfortable with staying at one club for 30 years. I want new restaurants, a new city, a new challenge.

"When I got to Munich, people asked, 'Why Germany and not England?' I want to experience the emotions there. Why England? That's my instinct right now."

Guardiola insisted that no deal had been agreed with an English clubs. So what are the options open to him?

MANCHESTER CITY

The overwhelming favourites to hire Guardiola, thanks to his links with two key City executives.

Txiki Begiristain and Ferran Soriano, now City's director of football and chief exective respectively, held the same positions at Barcelona when Guardiola was coach at Camp Nou.

City have copied Barcelona's blueprint lock, stock and barrel, and Guardiola's arrival as head coach would simply confirm this.

MANCHESTER UNITED

The history and heritage at Old Trafford would appeal to Guardiola, but the United hierachy are reluctant to compete with City for his signature.

ARSENAL

Probably the best long-term fit for Guardiola in terms of a football philsophy shared by Guardiola and Arsene Wenger. The London lifestyle would also appeal, but the big obstacle is that Wenger shows no sign of retiring.

CHELSEA

The London club has the budget to compete with City but Guardiola is likely to be deterred by the need for a squad rebuild and owner Roman Abramovich's habit of interfering with team affairs.

ANOTHER SABBATICAL?

Guardiola could delay his departure for England. "When I sign a contract I will announce it immediately," he said. "Maybe it will be two years until I will coach a team in England."

He spent the 2012-13 season living in New York with his family.

Doctor's orders...Volker Braun (right) with centre-forward Robert Lewandowski

Boss...with Matthias Sammer

times, found him decidedly unwilling to engage in open dialogue.

As for his relationship with the media, it can only be described as non existent. One-on-one interviews simply do not happen and at press conferences, he rarely opens up, mainly serving up platitudes.

"Guardiola focuses only on the tactics," former Bayern boss Hitzfeld once sniffily declared. "He has had almost no meetings with his players and has sealed himself off from the media."

Over the years, it has become something of an urban myth that Guardiola lacks warmth and does not interact closely with his players.

Not surprisingly, many of his current charges beg to differ with that opinion. According to Boateng, he is the only coach who has ever talked seriously about the nuts and bolts of the game.

If Guardiola was aloof and a poor communicator, he would not be able to put his often complex messages across. Along with his tactical nous, his strongest suit is his flair for improving players.

Without the right words and the empathy, the task would be beyond him.

One of life's eternally-dissatisfied characters, Guardiola was never going to spend three years at Bayern in total agreement with those around him.

Used to calling the transfer shots at Barcelona, he simply could not understand why the club's director of sport, Matthias Sammer, and not he, had the final word on who to sign. He also came to feel that he did not wield enough influence in the area

Cheers...2015 title win

of youth development.

While such differences of opinion were largely kept under wraps, there was no hiding his long-running feud with the Bayern medical department. Repeated rows with long-serving club doctor Hans-Wilhelm Muller-Wohlfahrt over the diagnoses of injuries and the latter's refusal to attend training sessions, eventually led to the world-renowned orthopaedic specialist resigning last year, claiming he had been scapegoated for a Champions League defeat away to Porto.

A substantial proportion of Bayern followers thought Guardiola had acted arrogantly in the affair, but he rode out the storm. Recently it emerged that he was still at war with the men in white coats, apparently blaming new club doctor Volker Braun for yet another injury setback for

> "Guardiola focuses only on tactics. He has almost no meetings with his players and seals himself off from the media"
>
> **Ex-Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld**

Ribery who – apart from a cameo in December – has been sidelined for a year with an ankle problem.

It's often asserted that Guardiola is allergic to ceding authority, that he is on a power trip. But in his eyes, attention to detail is the A to Z of his job, applying the highest of standards to every aspect of the first team's performance. Fastidious, yes. A control freak, undoubtedly. But never the dictator some make him out to be.

Always in search of those extra percentage points of effectiveness, it may actually be easier for Guardiola in England than in Germany, where coaches run the team and nothing else. A British-style manager enjoys a much wider remit.

Wherever he ends up, he is sure to be at the very centre of that club's sporting operation. Brain, heart and soul. WS

One to go...with his second Bundesliga shield

Managers index

Having said he will leave Bayern, Guardiola tops our latest rankings of the most in-demand coaches

1 Pep GUARDIOLA

Age: 45
Nationality: Spanish
Current status: Leaving Bayern Munich at the end of the season.
Style: Schooled in Barcelona but always open to new influences.
Past: Won multiple trophies with Barca and has continued winning in Germany.
Future: He says his next job will be in the Premier League.

2 Jose MOURINHO

Age: 53
Nationality: Portuguese
Current status: Unattached after being sacked by Chelsea in December 2016.
Style: Brash and confrontational but also pays incredible attention to detail.
Past: Multiple trophies with Porto, Chelsea, Internazionale and Real Madrid but has never lasted more than three seasons.
Future: Would love to replace Louis Van Gaal at Manchester United but may have to wait.

3 Diego SIMEONE

Age: 45
Nationality: Argentinian
Current status: Contracted until 2020 to Atletico Madrid, where he has been highly successful, winning La Liga and reaching the 2014 Champions League Final.
Style: Brilliant organiser and motivator.
Past: Won titles with Estudiantes and River Plate in Argentina but less successful with San Lorenzo.
Future: Atletico's transfer ban may tip him towards the exit, with wealthy suitors such as Chelsea prepared to tempt him away.

4 Jorge SAMPAOLI

Age: 55
Nationality: Argentinian
Current status: Has just left his post as Chile's national coach.
Style: A protege of Marcelo Bielsa, he likes aggressive, attacking football.
Past: Led Chile to success at last summer's Copa America.
Future: Keen to test himself with a major European club.

5 Frank DE BOER

Age: 45
Nationality: Dutch
Current status: Contracted to Ajax until 2017 after leading the Amsterdam club to four successive Dutch league titles between 2011 and 2014.
Style: Committed to youth and possession-based attack.
Past: Former Ajax and Barcelona defender, he was Holland assistant coach at the 2010 World Cup.
Future: Linked with several Premier League clubs.

6 Marcelo BIELSA

Age: 60
Nationality: Argentinian
Current status: Unattached after leaving Marseille following their opening game of this season.
Style: Eccentric, dedicated, unpredictable.
Past: Created attack-minded teams at Newell's Old Boys and Athletic Bilbao, and the national teams of Argentina and Chile.
Future: Uncertain following the nature of his OM walkout. Recently turned down Swansea City.

7 Rafa BENITEZ

Age: 55
Nationality: Spanish
Current status: Unattached after leaving Real Madrid in January 2016.
Style: Clever tactician and organiser.
Past: Won Spanish league titles with Valencia and the Champions League with Liverpool. Less successful in Italy at Inter and Napoli.
Future: Uncertain, though his wife and family are still living in England.

8 Brendan RODGERS

Age: 42
Nationality: British
Current status: Unattached after leaving Liverpool in autumn 2015.
Style: Thoughtful tactician who is keen to develop players.
Past: Failed to win a trophy in three seasons at Liverpool, who were pipped to the 2014 league title by Manchester City.
Future: Probably in the Premier League but he may try his luck abroad.

9 Manuel PELLEGRINI

Age: 62
Nationality: Chilean
Current status: Contracted to Manchester City until 2017.
Style: Low-key, calm under pressure.
Past: Took Villarreal and Malaga into the Champions League. In one season at Real Madrid, he steered the club to a then-record 96 points in La Liga.
Future: Likely to leave City this summer but will not be short of offers.

10 Lucien FAVRE

Age: 58
Nationality: Swiss
Current status: Unattached after leaving Borussia Monchengladbach following a disappointing start to the season.
Style: Tactically astute, fast-paced counter-attacking.
Past: Transformed Gladbach into Champions League contenders. Previously with Hertha Berlin, Zurich and Servette.
Future: Recently turned down Lyon. Linked with Stuttgart and Galatasaray.

11 David MOYES

Age: 52
Nationality: Scottish
Current status: Unattached after leaving Real Sociedad in November 2015.

12 Fabio CAPELLO

Age: 69
Nationality: Italian
Current status: Unattached after leaving his post with Russia in autumn 2015.

13 Jos LUHUKAY

Age: 51
Nationality: Dutch
Current status: Unattached after leaving Hertha Berlin in February 2015 but linked to a number of clubs.

14 Walter MAZZARRI

Age: 54
Nationality: Italian
Current status: Unattached since leaving Internazionale in November 2014.

15 Andre VILLAS-BOAS

Age: 38
Nationality: Portuguese
Current status: Coach of Zenit but has said he will leave at the end of the season.

16 Michael LAUDRUP

Age: 51
Nationality: Danish
Current status: Unattached after leaving Qatar champions Lekhwiya last summer.

17 Cesare PRANDELLI

Age: 58
Nationality: Italian
Current status: Unattached after leaving Galatasaray in 2014.

18 Julen LOPETEGUI

Age: 49
Nationality: Spanish
Current status: Unattached after leaving Porto in January 2016.

19 Rudi GARCIA

Age: 51
Nationality: French
Current status: Unattached after leaving Roma in January 2016 and keen to work in England.

20 Hubert FOURNIER

Age: 48
Nationality: French
Current status: Unattached after leaving Lyon in December 2015.

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

BELGIAN LEAGUE

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Leander DENDONCKER

Age 20 (15.04.95), Anderlecht & Belgium

In a sentence
Amazingly mature, he can turn his hand to any sort of defensive mission, shining as a midfield holder for Anderlecht and at centre-back with Belgium's under-21s.

What they say
Jean-Francois Remy, Belgium under-21s assistant coach: "If he is to turn into a Kompany, he must eat a lot more bread and butter, but he's undeniably impressive athletically. You have to look at him as an extremely strong prospect for the future."

Jean Kindermans, Anderlecht youth-team coach: "He's a level-headed boy. He likes to do things correctly. He was like this at school, going about his studies in a serious manner and making sure he passed his exams. He has an exemplary work ethic"

The story so far
The son of pig farmers from the West Flemish village of Passchendaele – the site of one of World War One's most famous battles – he was an Anderlecht fan as a boy, so needed no persuading when the Brussels club offered him a place in their academy at the age of 13. Once he had starred for the under-19 side in the European NextGen Series, promotion to the senior squad was a formality. He made his Belgian league debut in August 2014, against Oostende, and got his first taste of the Champions League the following month, coming on as a substitute against Galatasaray. He has been key for "*Les Mauves*" ever since, and in June last year he won his first senior cap with a five-minute cameo in a 4-3 friendly win in France.

> "He's a calm and level-headed boy. He likes to do things correctly"
> Anderlecht youth-team coach Jean Kindermans

Wanted...Anderlecht won't let Leander Dendoncker go without a fight

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT DENDONCKER

- He comes from a football family. Younger brother Lars plays for Club Brugge juniors, while elder sibling Andres is a centre-back with West Flemish regional league side Meulebeke. His mother, Katrien, used to play the game, too.
- His favourite player is Barcelona defensive midfielder Sergio Busquets.
- In 2014, Anderlecht were so keen to recruit Zulte Waregem's midfielder Thorgan Hazard, that they offered Dendoncker in part-exchange. Luckily for Anderlecht, Zulte coach Francky Dury was not interested in a deal.

Euro test...taking on Erik Lamela (left) of Tottenham Hotspur in the Europa League

The next step
After signing a five-year contract extension last May – which will take him through until June 2020 – he is extremely unlikely to be on the move in the immediate future. Chelsea are just one of several Premier League clubs rumoured to be monitoring him, but Anderlecht general manager Herman Van Holsbeeck will not give up his jewel without a fight.

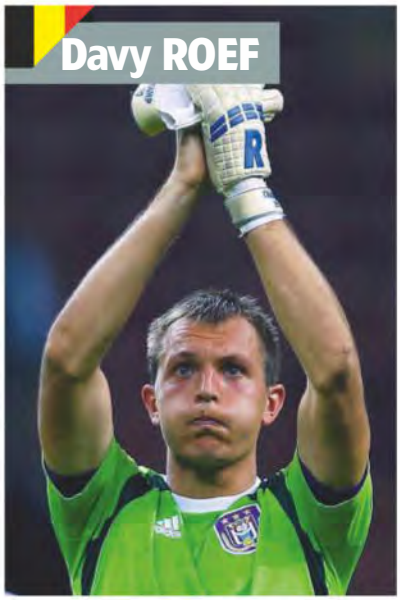
Strengths
He is big, strong, mobile, good in the air and has no problem staying focused. Boasts an excellent range of passing, can glide forward with the ball at his feet and packs a strong shot from long distance. Disciplined and very composed.

Weaknesses
Lacks personality. At times he is too restrained and self-effacing. Must be more aggressive on the pitch.

Neeskens KEBONO

Age 23 (10.03.92), Genk & DR Congo
After not quite making the grade at Paris Saint-Germain, he has pushed on in Belgium, first at Charleroi and then Genk, who he joined this season. As an attacking midfielder or false nine, he is a huge threat when given the freedom to roam. The Democratic Republic of Congo international owes his christian name to his father's enthusiasm for 1970s Dutch star Johan Neeskens.

Davy ROEF



Age 21 (06.02.94), Anderlecht & Belgium
Many believe it is only a matter of time before the Belgium under-21 goalkeeper displaces Silvio Proto as the Brussels club's number one. Has been outstanding whenever called upon – a case in point being his five-star display in a Champions League tie against Galatasaray last season.

Jordan LUKAKU

Age 21 (25.07.94), Oostende & Belgium
Dynamic left-back or wingback who is the younger brother of Everton and Belgium striker Romelu Lukaku. Unlike his sibling, he was not considered good enough to make the leap from Anderlecht youth to first team, but he has fought back with a vengeance at Oostende, shaping up so well that he joined his sibling in the national squad last autumn. Says he would love to play in England.

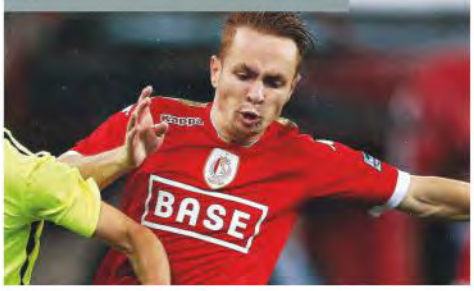
Thomas MEUNIER

Age 24 (12.09.91), Club Brugge & Belgium
All-action international whose career took off in 2012 when Club Brugge's coach at the time, Juan Carlos Garrido, turned him from a versatile attacker into an adventurous right-back. Just five years ago he was playing for third-tier Virton and working part-time in a shop.

Matz SELS

Age 23 (26.02.92), Gent & Belgium
Long-limbed goalkeeper who has gone from strength to strength since joining Gent from Lierse in January 2014. A key figure in the club's first-ever domestic league championship last season and has every chance of being Belgium's third choice at Euro 2016.

Adrien TREBEL



Age 24 (03.03.91), Standard Liege & France
Box-to-box midfielder whose appetite for the fight has made him a crowd favourite at Standard's cauldron-like Sclessin home. A graduate of the famous Nantes academy – the alma mater of Marcel Desailly, Didier Deschamps and Christian Karembeu – he is in his second season in Belgium.

Bryan VERBOOM

Age 23 (30.01.92), Zulte Waregem & Belgium
Left-back, fizzing with attacking intent, and another ex-Anderlecht junior who had to look elsewhere for first-team football. He first came to prominence in the Zulte Waregem side that finished second in the 2013 title race.

World Soccer vintage 11 years ago

February 2005

Di Canio provokes controversy in Rome derby

An exclusive interview with Ballon d'Or winner Andriy Shevchenko saw the Milan and Ukraine striker feature on the cover, but the big talking point at the turn of the year was Italy's first *Derby della Capitale* since Paolo Di Canio's return to Lazio.

"If you were hoping for peace, prosperity and tidings of comfort and joy in the Italian new year, you would have been sorely disappointed," wrote Paddy Agnew. "It was perhaps inevitable that, with a January 6 Rome derby, the year would soon be marked by fierce tensions and drama.

"The key figure in the dramatis personae was one Paolo Di Canio, Lazio's prodigal son cum standard-bearer, who returned this season to his very own alma mater after four years in the English wilderness."

Di Canio was back in Serie A after an eight-year break, spent at four British clubs, and this was his first reacquaintance with Roma.

Lazio were on a shocking run of form and had won only once in 12 matches since mid-October, taking just 17 points from their first 16 Serie A games.

"If there were to be a Lazio revival in 2005, it would have to start with Di Canio," continued Agnew. "Put simply, the side badly needed his passion and commitment to the cause.

"Come the Rome derby, Lazio got all that and a lot more as Di Canio proved to be the major protagonist.

"It says much about Di Canio's attitude to the game that under his light-blue Lazio shirt he wore a T-shirt bearing a Samurai inscription that read: 'There is only one way to return from a battle: either with your enemy's head or without your own'.

"In an emphatic 3-1 win, Di Canio opened the scoring and also proved himself man of the match. Sixteen years after his first appearance in a Rome derby, Di Canio was always going to go overboard in his post-match celebrations.

"This he duly did by gesturing at the Roma fans and greeting the Lazio fans with the infamous straight arm 'Roman Salute' much used and loved by the Fascist regime of '*Il Duce*', Benito Mussolini.

"At that point, all media-driven, politics-driven hell broke loose."

Di Canio would plead that the gesture had no political significance and released a statement claiming, as Agnew continued, that "his post-match celebrations 'had nothing to do with any type of political opinion, in particular the type of politics referred to by Mrs Floriani."

The "Mrs Floriani" that Di Canio referred to was the granddaughter of Mussolini and the leader of her own right-wing political party. She had said: "How great to see the Roman salute, very intriguing."

It wouldn't be the last time that Di Canio produced the salute. After falling out with Lazio owner Claudio Lotito, he left the club a year later and finished his playing career in the lower reaches of Serie C2. WS

"If you were hoping for peace, prosperity and tidings of comfort and joy in the Italian new year, you would have been sorely disappointed"

Storm...Di Canio salutes Lazio's fans

DISPATCHES ITALY

Straight arm tactics...Di Canio gives his controversial salute to Lazio fans at the end of the Rome derby

Demented derby

Di Canio is condemned for his 'Roman Salute' celebration after Lazio's defeat of Roma

PADDY AGNEW in Rome

IF YOU WERE hoping for peace, prosperity and tidings of comfort and joy in the Italian New Year, you would have been sorely disappointed. It was perhaps inevitable that with a January 6 Rome derby the year would soon be marked by fierce tensions and drama.

The key figure in the dramatis personae was one Paolo Di Canio, Lazio's prodigal son cum standard-bearer who returned this season to his very own alma mater after years in the English wilderness. Born in the tough Rome neighbourhood of Quarticciolo, Di Canio is a laziale through and through, someone who is just as much a club fan as a club player.

To underline that point, he accepted a significant wage drop to return to Rome for what looks like being a lively Indian summer to his successful career. Initially underused by coach Mimo Caso (it was suggested that he was less than 100 per cent fit, a suggestion he vehemently denies), 36-year-old Di Canio gradually played his way back into the side.

So much so that, concluding this column last month, I suggested that if there were to be a Lazio revival in 2005, it would have to start with Di Canio. Put simply, the side badly needed his passion and commitment to the cause.

Come the Rome derby, Lazio got all of that and a lot more from Di Canio as he proved to be the major protagonist. Given that the year's derby came after the Christmas/New Year break, we had a de facto two-week-long build-up to the match, allowing for both sides to engage in a deal of psychological warfare.

Totti v Di Canio

Roma captain Francesco Totti opened exchanges by saying that he really did not know nor did he want to know Di Canio. To which the Lazio man replied cheerfully: "Totti is quite right not to invite me to dinner. If I started talking to him about the Middle East, he would think I was referring to a midfield position."

On and on went the bantering to the point that when the teams took to the pitch at a packed Olympic stadium, tension and tempers were already simmering. It would clearly take little for them to reach the boil.

18 WORLD SOCCER

It says much about Di Canio's attitude to the game that under his light blue Lazio shirt, he wore a T-shirt bearing a Samurai inscription that read: "There is only one way to return from a battle – either with your enemy's head or without your own."

Adding spice to the preparations was the fact that Roma went into the game strong favourites, having ended 2004 with a sumptuous 5-1 drubbing of Parma. Lazio, in contrast, went into the match just above the relegation zone and on the back of an emphatic 3-0 drubbing by Udinese that had cost coach Caso his job, with former Siena coach Giuseppe Papadopulo in as his replacement.

Come the game, Lazio turned all the expert predictions on their heads in an emphatic 3-1 win in which Di Canio not only opened the scoring with an exquisite goal but also proved himself man of the match. In the circumstances, 16 years after his first appearance in a Rome derby, Di Canio was always going to go overboard in his post-match celebrations.

This he duly did not only by gesturing at the Roma fans (it was a Lazio 'home' game) but also when greeting the Lazio fans with the infamous straight arm 'Roman Salute', much used and loved by the Fascist regime of *Il Duce*, Benito Mussolini. At that point, all media-driven, politics-driven hell broke loose.

In vain Di Canio protested that his gesture had no political significance, that it was merely a "heat of the moment" celebratory thing. Others thought otherwise. For a start, *Il Duce*'s granddaughter, Alessandra Mussolini, a current MP at the head of her own right-wing party, expressed her pleasure, saying: "How great it was to see that Roman salute, absolutely intriguing. I will have to write Di Canio a letter of thanks."

To which Di Canio promptly replied with a formal statement in which he claimed that his post-match celebrations "had nothing to do with any type of political opinion, in particular the type of politics referred to by Mrs Floriani". Significantly, Di Canio used Mussolini's married name rather than that infamous surname.

As the debate raged, Di Canio received as much support as he did criticism. Enzo Foschi, head of Rome city council's sports commission, called the gesture "a matter of shame for football, for the city of Rome and for the club Lazio", while former Roma and Lazio coach Zdenek Zeman condemned Di Canio for having behaved like a hardline 'ultra' fan.

In contrast, though, Milan coach and former Roma player Carlo Ancelotti argued that such gestures were all part of the derby rivalry. Meanwhile, Juventus goalkeeper Gigi Buffon pointed out that when Totti had jeered Juventus players last season by holding up four fingers to indicate the four goals by which Juve were losing, nobody had made much of it.

'It's a matter of shame for football, for the city of Rome and for Lazio'

Enzo Foschi, head of Rome city council's sports commission

Milestone...Paolo Maldini

● Twenty years ago, on January 20, 1985, Milan coach Nils Liedholm, short of fit players in a Serie A game against Udinese, launched the first-class career of arguably the outstanding Italian player of his generation, Paolo Maldini, then a mere 16-year-old.

Today, Maldini is still among the best defenders in Serie A and what is more he is still playing for Milan, the one and only club of his illustrious career. Looking back over the years, Italy's most capped player (126) recently suggested that the sort of debut he made would be impossible today.

"I started at 16 because, with a couple of players injured, there was a chance. Today, all the big clubs have 25 or more players; it makes it very, very hard to get a break."

In the meantime, Di Canio's autobiography was hurriedly pulled off the shelf and dusted down with a keen eye on his words of praise for Mussolini. The implication of some commentaries was that Di Canio is a fascist thug, with the definitive proof being the word *Dux* (Duce) tattooed on his arm.

In the end, a definitive judgement on the matter will come (probably in mid-February) from the football federation's investigations committee, due to analyse the episode with a view to the charge of bringing the game into disrepute. Italy's special police services unit, Digos, is also looking into the affair.

Italy's hottest game

One thing is for sure – nine months after the last Rome derby was postponed and later replayed because of apparent player intimidation by Roma fans, the fixture has once again confirmed itself as the hottest in Italian football.

Outside Roma, the biggest splashes were created not by the top two, Juventus and Milan (who are in a league of their own), but by a number of coach comings and goings either side of the holiday break.

Atalanta coach Andrea Mandorlini had already gone in mid-December, replaced by former Lecce coach Delio Rossi. Next to go, on the eve of the break was Parma coach Silvio Baldini, replaced by Pietro Carmignani. Two days into 2005 and another two coaches, Franco Colomba of Livorno and Gigi Simoni of Siena, had bitten the dust, replaced respectively by former Milan player Roberto Donadoni and Gigi Di Canio. In all, six Serie A coaches have been sacked or have resigned so far this season.

Not all of these sackings seemed logical. In particular, both Colomba and Simoni appeared to be doing reasonable jobs in difficult circumstances. Expressing his sympathy with his colleagues, Milan coach Ancelotti commented that, unfortunately, "we coaches are sometimes in the hands of club directors and owners who simply are not competent".

Ancelotti, of course, should know since his boss, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, has never been afraid to intervene directly in the affairs of Milan – most memorably in the spring of 2001 when, in the midst of a frenetic general election campaign, he ordered the sacking of coach Alberto Zaccheroni after watching Milan's elimination from the Champions League.

Ancelotti's comments gave rise to no small amount of debate, with many of his colleagues expressing their agreement. One club owner who clearly does not agree is Giuseppe Coccimiglio of Third Division Foggia. In the first week of January, he sacked his coach, Giuseppe Giannini, replacing him with himself. Furthermore, on his debut on the bench, he 'led' Foggia to a win over Reggiana.

In fairness, though, Coccimiglio did admit that much of the credit for the win should go to the "advice" given him by senior team player Giovanni Stroppa. Mind you, Coccimiglio could be on the way to establishing a dangerous precedent. We will watch closely to assess just how long his tenure on the bench lasts.

One final thought concerns the January announcement by federation president Franco Carraro that Italian football has secured government backing for its intended bid for the 2012 European Championship finals. If Italy were to land this plum, argued Carraro, it would represent a golden opportunity to renovate Italy's sadly outdated stadia.

And so say all of us.

Also in this issue...

p10 Brian Glanville put the boot into the England captain in his column, writing: "Poor little rich boy! Poor, misunderstood David Beckham. Hardly had the echoes died from his monumentally flamboyant 'christening party' for Brooklyn and Romeo, [where he] was able to put on a jamboree that entailed a 350ft-long marquee and two cars that cost in excess of £165,000 than he was publicly lamenting the way he was criticised whenever he made the least mistake. Beckham really cannot have it both ways. If he and his wife choose to live a life that gives conspicuous consumption a bad name, how can they logically object to perpetual publicity, be it good or bad?"

p16 Boca Juniors' Carlos Tevez was the subject of a transfer controversy when Media Sports Investments and their president, Kia Joorabchian, signed him for Corinthians for £10.5m but retained his registration.

p22-23 When asked about his first experience of British football, Andriy Shevchenko said: "The Dynamo [Kiev] under-14 team took part in an international youth tournament in Aberystwyth, in Wales. We won the competition. I was named the best player and received a pair of boots from legendary Liverpool forward Ian Rush. The boots were too small for me but I still tried to play in them – until my big toes poked through."

p49 Denmark correspondent Jim Holden wrote: "The career of hard man Stig Tofting may be over after yet another violent incident. The 35-year-old was sacked by hometown club AGF Aarhus after a clash with team-mate Soren Pedersen at a players' Christmas party."

10 years ago

Thierry Henry scored the only goal of Arsenal's Champions League round-of-16 first-leg tie away to Real Madrid as the Gunners won became the first English team to taste victory at the Estadio Santiago Bernabeu. They reached the quarter-finals with a 1-0 aggregate win.

20 years ago

Host nation South Africa, led by coach Clive Barker, won the African Nations Cup for the first and only time in their history, beating Tunisia 2-0 in the Final in Johannesburg. Nelson Mandela was there to present the trophy to *Bafana Bafana* captain Neil Tovey.

30 years ago

Milan president Giuseppe Farina announced that the Italian club were facing debts of £12million and were "in the most sensational financial crisis in Italian sports history". Waiting in the wings to rescue the club, however, was a certain Silvio Berlusconi...

40 years ago

Dennis Tueart's spectacular overhead kick and a goal from Peter Barnes gave Manchester City victory over Newcastle United in the League Cup Final at Wembley. It was City's first major trophy for six years and would be their last until they won the FA Cup 35 years later.

50 years ago

At the age of 26, Brazilian superstar Pele married his first wife, Rosemeri Dos Reis Cholbi, in Santos on February 21. The couple honeymooned in Europe, spending time in Salzburg, Austria, before travelling on to Germany and Italy.

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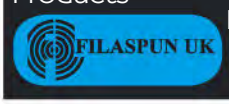

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PLUS

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Focused...Croatia's Domagoj Vida (left) and Darijo Srna

PREVIEW

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Euro bound ...Slovakia

CROATIA

Heading to France after a controversial qualifying campaign

OVERVIEW

Despite calling on players based at some of Europe's leading clubs, Croatia struggled in the qualifiers.

- Croatia have qualified for five out of six Euro finals since independence.
- Croatia were deducted a point and were forced to play two games behind closed doors after their home game against Italy, in June 2015, was played on a pitch with a swastika clearly marked out in the grass.
- Niko Kovac was sacked as coach following the away defeat to Norway. His replacement, Ante Cacic, was criticised for a lack of experience and for the selection of Josip Simunic as his assistant. Simunic was banned for 10 games in 2013 after leading fans in a pro-Nazi chant following victory in a World Cup play-off.
- Cacic has a star-studded midfield, with Luka Modric and Mateo Kovacic of Real Madrid and Barcelona's Ivan Rakitic, while a number of Italy-based players are in fine form. Defence, led by veteran captain Darijo Srna, is a potential weakness.

Flare-up...fans caused trouble against Italy in Milan

TACTICS

Cacic can call upon some in-form players – Fiorentina's Nikola Kalinic could edge out Mario Mandzukic as the lone striker in front of a five-man midfield – while the midfield axis of Rakitic and Modric could be augmented by the more combative Marcelo Brozovic or Milan Badelj.

STAR MAN

Ivan RAKITIC

The midfielder is one of Europe's most accomplished performers.

COACH

Ante CACIC

A controversial appointment when he left Lokomotiv Zagreb to succeed Niko Kovac in September 2015.

PLAYER PROFILE

High flier...Ivan Perisic celebrates his goal against Italy in the San Siro

IVAN PERISIC

While nine-tenths of media copy about the "Croatia Class of 2016" centres on the ultra-confident pronouncements of coach Ante Cacic and the game-changing abilities of Spanish-based engine-room superstars, Ivan Rakitic and Luka Modric, the vital attacking role played by Perisic often goes unnoticed.

The left-sided midfielder, who cost Internazionale €20million when they signed him from Wolfsburg last summer, was Croatia's top marksman in qualification with six goals – tellingly scoring more than Rakitic, Modric and main striker Mario Mandzukic put together – and proved especially decisive in the most important fixtures. He was on target in the home victories over Norway and Bulgaria and the vital 1-1 draw at the San Siro against Italy, and also scored the only goal of the final game against Malta which sealed Croatia's place at the finals.

Two-footed, quick, technical, hard to knock off the ball and a considerable threat when cutting inside and letting fly, the 26-year-old is simply an excellent all-rounder, a copper-bottomed guarantee of balance, enterprise and cutting edge.

In line to rack up his 50th cap for his country if the *Vatreni* make the knock-out phase in France.

Nick Bidwell

RUSSIA

Coaching switch pays off for 2018 World Cup hosts

OVERVIEW

The Russian campaign was revived after Leonid Slutsky replaced the highly paid Italian, Fabio Capello, midway through the qualifiers.

- Russia's qualifying campaign was dominated by debate over the tenure of coach Capello. The Italian was one of the world's highest-paid coaches but was sacked in July 2015 after Russia won only two of their first six qualifying matches.
- Under Slutsky, Russia enjoyed a remarkable turnaround, winning his last four matches to pip Sweden to second place in the group.
- Russia will travel to France with one eye on preparations for the 2018 World Cup on home soil. Calls to naturalise foreign-born players, such as Lokomotiv Moscow goalkeeper Guilherme, CSKA defender Mario Fernandes and former Spartak striker Welliton, have grown in recent months as the country seeks new talent for the national side.
- Russia achieved their best European Championship result in 2008, when they reached the semi-finals under Guus Hiddink.

Goal...Fedor Smolov scores against Liechtenstein

TACTICS

Since taking over from Capello, Slutsky has brought 6ft 5in centre-forward Artyom Dzyuba back into the side, which leaves the team open to accusation of one-dimensional play. An ageing central defence (Vasili Berezutski is 33, Sergei Ignashevich 36) is a concern.

STAR MAN

Alan DZAGOEV

The CSKA central midfielder has been a key player, at club and international level, for coach Slutsky.

COACH

Leonid SLUTSKY

Coach of CSKA Moscow since 2009, he took over from Fabio Capello last autumn while carrying on as CSKA boss.

PLAYER PROFILE

Split...Aleksandr Kokorin divides opinion in his homeland

ALEKSANDR KOKORIN

The prospect of his Russia side going head-to-head with England in Group B must be making the mouth water of the Dynamo Moscow's attacking-third poster boy, who has often been linked with a move to the Premier League and now has the perfect platform to sell his wares to an Anglo audience

Comfortable as a striker, winger or playmaker, the 24-year-old scored three goals for the *Sbornaya* in the qualifiers and should he bring his composed finishing, creativity and bold as brass attitude to the Gallic party, the Russians will be in business.

While Fabio Capello deployed Kokorin as a centre-forward, new coach Leonid Slutsky has moved him to the right side of midfield to accommodate giant striker Artyom Dzyuba.

He arguably is the most polarising figure in the Russian game, with one half of the football nation regarding him as a once-in-a-generation genius and the other lambasting him for his inconsistency and failure to build on the immense promise he displayed early in his career.

He has struggled with injury for much of this season – playing only eight games for Dynamo – and clearly has a lot of match sharpness to make up.

Nick Bidwell

SLOVAKIA

First Euro finals for Hamsik and co

OVERVIEW

Slovakia are preparing for their first Euro finals after beating Spain and Ukraine in the qualifiers.

- Slovakia qualified for their first European Championship after finishing second behind Spain in their group. The most eye-catching result was the home win over Spain. However, the opening victory against Ukraine in Kiev would prove just as important.
- Coach Jan Kozak has assembled a tight-knit squad of hard-working players and is not afraid of innovation, occasionally deploying youngsters or switching tactics.
- Slovakia's key players are spread around Europe, including in Italy (Marek Hamsik and Juraj Kucka), England (Martin Skrtel) and Russia (Jan Durica). Vladimir Weiss, now plays in Qatar.
- Slovakia's first major tournament was the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, where they surprised many by defeating defending world champions Italy before losing to Holland in the last 16.

Shock result...celebrating victory in Kiev

TACTICS

Hamsik, Weiss and Robert Mak provide the biggest goal threat, behind a lone striker, Michal Duris or Adam Nemec. Kozak could do away with a striker completely and play a false nine, as Hamsik did against Slovakia in the win over Spain in qualifying. Miroslav Stoch is a wildcard option from the bench.

STAR MAN

Marek HAMSIK

Attacking midfielder, with his distinctive trademark mohican, is captain of both club, Napoli, and country.

COACH

Jan KOZAK

Former Czechoslovakia international has been in charge since 2013. He previously took Kosice into the Champions League.

PLAYER PROFILE

Fighter...Juraj Kucka has won over his doubters and twice come back from serious injury

JURAJ KUCKA

If one player embodies the overachieving Slovak team, so cleverly assembled by coach Jan Kozak, it is Milan midfield dynamo Kucka, whose single-mindedness, resilience, humility and total commitment to the cause are the adhesive which holds the unit together. In every sense, Kucka is Slovakia's talisman and their team's emotional leader.

In spite of mainly being deployed by Kozak in a holding role – in which he stands guard in front of the back-four and does much of the defensive dirty work of playmaking diva Marek Hamsik – the former Sparta Prague and Genoa warrior also loves to support the attack whenever he gets the opportunity.

Much to his delight, Kucka was twice on the scoresheet on the road to France 2016, notably smashing home a free-kick in the shock 2-1 victory over European champions Spain in October 2014 – the Iberians' first defeat in tournament qualification in 37 games.

He was a starter in two of Slovakia's games at the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa and the 28-year-old's life story is a chronicle of success against the odds, always able to win over those who doubted him and twice fighting back from serious knee injuries.

Nick Bidwell

TURKEY

Fatih Terim hoping for third time lucky with national side

OVERVIEW

Turkey travel to France on a high after their dramatic qualification for the finals.

Turkey squeezed through to Euro 2016 as the best third-placed team after finishing behind Czech Republic and Iceland in their qualifying group. They appeared to have little chance of qualification, but in their final two games they won away against the Czechs and beat Iceland with a last-minute goal to clinch their place in the finals.

Coach Fatih Terim is in his third spell in charge. In his first spell, Turkey qualified for their first major finals, Euro 96. In his second, he guided them to the semi-finals of Euro 2008, where they lost to Germany.

The vast majority of the squad are with clubs in the Turkish league. The exceptions are Arda Turan, the midfielder who joined Barcelona from Atletico Madrid last year, and midfielder Hakan Calhanoglu of Bayer Leverkusen. Turkey also have high hopes for Mainz midfielder Yunus Malli, who was born in Germany and played for Germany's under-21s but recently opted to play senior international football for Turkey.

Stop...keeper Volkan Babacan denies Holland

TACTICS

Burak Yilmaz (19 goals in 42 caps) has excelled in the lone striker role for Fatih Terim. Mehmet Topal, Volkan Sen and Gokhan Torea are other midfield options. Hakan Calhanoglu is the man to watch from free-kicks, while Yunus Malli could feature in an attacking midfield role.

STAR MAN

ARDA Turan

Turkey's most high-profile player recently made his Barcelona debut after being laid low by the club's transfer ban.

COACH

Fatih TERIM

"The Emperor" is Turkish football's most successful coach, having won the UEFA Cup in 2000 with Galatasaray.

PLAYER PROFILE

Exciting...Hakan Calhanoglu must now add consistency to his game

HAKAN CALHANOGLU

In their recently published Bundesliga player rankings, German magazine *Kicker* did not deem Leverkusen starlet Hakan Calhanoglu worthy of a place in the attacking midfield top 10, explaining that the decision not to include him was due to his irregular levels of performance this term. But do not write off this diamond in the rough just yet.

Although mercurial and, at times, not as disciplined on the field as he should be, the 21-year-old Deutschland-born Turk is nonetheless a wonderful prospect. He can be an intoxicating mixture of subtle ball-skills, vivid imagination and long-distance shooting accuracy from open play or dead-balls.

Inspired dead-ball work can make all the difference and, in Calhanoglu, Turkey have a Cristiano Ronaldo-like master of the art. He already has an impressive collection of free-kick strikes to his name and the subsequent YouTube tributes. No wonder Leverkusen coach, Roger Schmidt calls him "Golden Foot".

A full international since October 2013, Calhanoglu offers a myriad of options to Turkey boss Fatih Terim, who could use him either as a pure playmaker, on either flank, leader of the line or second striker. Variety very much is the spice of his life.

Nick Bidwell

Libertadores Cup

TIM VICKERY

Boca the team to beat

Buenos Aires side favourites to make it three in a row for Argentina in 2016

THE BIG GUNS: ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL

In December, once again, the champions of South America were found wanting in the Club World Cup. The last team from the continent to win the trophy were Corinthians in 2012 under coach Tite, whose 2015 Brazilian title-winning team had looked set to enter this year's Libertadores as favourites. That, however, was until Chinese money arrived and carried off their most important players.

The constant loss of leading talent – now to China, the Middle East and USA as well as Europe – has clearly had a detrimental effect on the quality of the regional club game. It also makes continued success very difficult, since winning major titles inevitably puts the best players in the shop window.

Corinthians are far from the only team forced into rapid rebuilding, and much the same applies to reigning Libertadores champions **River Plate**, with the Argentinians also looking set to overhaul their side during the course of the competition.

Depth of squad and new arrivals plus considerable continuity means that River's great rivals, **Boca Juniors**, are now the competition's leading contenders. The addition of Dani Osvaldo to play alongside Carlos Tevez gives Rodolfo Arruabarrena's team unmatched firepower, and with Fernando Gago in midfield there is an experienced spine to help the development of some interesting youngsters.

In addition to the big two, a strong contingent from Argentina – which has come out on top in the last two years – also includes **Rosario Central**, so eye-catching last year under Eduardo Coudet, who is yet another promising young Argentinian coach.

Central's chances have been boosted by the retention of their centre-forward Marco Ruben, who offers a huge aerial threat. Meanwhile, Facundo Sava has taken over at **Racing**, who will have the Diego Milito-Gustavo Bou front partnership for another six months while highly-rated Pablo Guede is the new man in charge of 2014 Libertadores champions **San Lorenzo**.

Edgardo Bauza, the winning coach on that occasion, has made a fascinating move to Brazil, where he takes over at **Sao Paulo**, who face Cesar Vallejo of Peru in the qualifying round. As the club look to rebuild, much will be expected of a man with two previous Libertadores titles to his name – the other coming with LDU of Ecuador in 2008.

After losing so many first-team players, Tite's **Corinthians** are something of an unknown quantity, and it could be that the most consistent challenge from Brazil is from 2013 winners **Atletico Mineiro**. They have also appointed a new foreign coach, although Uruguay's Diego Aguirre is far better acquainted with Brazil than Bauza, and they have kept an interesting squad together, adding quality reinforcements such as Ecuadorian playmaker Juan Cazares.

The other two Brazilian representatives are **Gremio**, where coach Roger Machado has been doing a fine job, and **Palmeiras**, buoyed by their splendid new stadium. Both, however, will be tested early on as they have been drawn in strong groups.

INTERESTING OUTSIDERS: PARAGUAY, COLOMBIA AND MEXICO

With two finalists and a semi-finalist in the last three years, Paraguayan teams cannot be discounted, especially with the presence this year of the big two, **Olimpia** and **Cerro Porteno**. Little **Guarani**, so impressive in last year's run to the last four, have lost coach Fernando Jubero and also have a tricky qualifying tie against Ecuador's Independiente del Valle.

If the seven-year Argentina/Brazil monopoly is to end, Colombia could provide the team to do so. **Santa Fe** will have to qualify but proved their mettle towards the end of last year by winning the Sudamericana Cup, while **Deportivo Cali** have a fine crop of youngsters. However, the standout side are reigning domestic champions **Atletico Nacional**. Coach Reinaldo Rueda ➤

Back...Victor Ibarbo has joined Atletico Nacional on loan

> "From now on you'll see a new Boca Juniors"
>
> **Carlos Tevez is determined to spearhead Argentina's champions to a seventh Libertadores crown**

Brazilian challenge...Atletico Mineiro (stripes) and Corinthians

Preview

Striking role...Dani Osvaldo's partnership with Carlos Tevez could be key to Boca Juniors' campaign

Veteran debutant...Penarol's Diego Forlan will be playing in his first Libertadores Cup

may find it hard to replace the speed of Oscar Murillo – now with Pachuca in Mexico – in what was a solid defensive unit, but his squad looks full of depth, high on confidence and sees the return of Colombia international forward Victor Ibarbo on loan from Cagliari. The club will go into the competition believing a repeat of their 1989 triumph is a genuine possibility.

Another feasible outcome is a Mexican success story. Last year, Tigres became the third team from LigaMX to reach the Final, and this year's trio of **Pumas**, **Toluca** and **Puebla** all highlight the relative economic power of Mexican football.

The trio are all full of South American talent, although one possible complication for a Mexican challenge could be a fixture pile-up in May, when the early knockout rounds of the Libertadores coincide with the play-off stages of the domestic league.

LESS LIKELY LADS: ECUADOR, URUGUAY AND CHILE

LDU Quito of Ecuador, in 2008, were the last Libertadores winners from outside Brazil or Argentina. Few will relish the trip to Quito, but it would be asking a lot for a repetition from the team recently taken over by Argentinian coach Claudio Borghi. Quarter-finalists last year, **Emelec** of Guayaquil have been consistent performers of late, but will surely suffer from the almost certain loss of top striker Miler Bolanos.

Penarol of Uruguay have a star man of their own in 36-year-old Diego Forlan, who will be playing in his first Libertadores. Their blend of veterans and youngsters will be worth watching, but a first Uruguayan title since 1988 looks a long shot for them or **Nacional**, who are boosted by the return of striker Nico Lopez on loan from Udinese after a premature move to Europe.

Chilean clubs have been underperforming in the Libertadores for some time and there would seem to be little chance of the trend being bucked by **Colo Colo**, **Cobresal** or by 2010 and 2012 semi-finalists **Universidad de Chile**, who are now coached by Jorge Sampaoli's former assistant Sebastian Beccacece.

> "It's the team my father played for, and who have been South American champions five times"
>
> Diego Forlan hopes to add one more with Penarol

THE OTHERS: PERU, VENEZUELA AND BOLIVIA

Both Peru and Venezuela have a dismal recent record in the competition, but in only their third appearance, reigning Peruvian champions **Melgar** of Arequipa should be worth watching – if only for the fact that coach Juan Reynoso is such a quietly compelling figure.

Also compelling were **Bolivar** in 2014, when they broke a long run of dreadful Bolivian performances in the tournament with a run to the semi-finals. Even more surprising was that their away form was better than at the extreme altitude of La Paz. Bolivar missed out on last year's competition but return with a reminder that part of the appeal of the Libertadores is its unpredictability, with the permanent state of flux in South American club football always opening up space for a surprise. WS

KEY DATES

QUALIFYING ROUND
FEB 3 &10

GROUP STAGE
FEB 17 & 23; MAR 2, 9 & 16; APR 6, 13 & 20

KNOCKOUT STAGE
TBC

• *For draw details, see page 95*

Long odds...Peruvian champions Melgar

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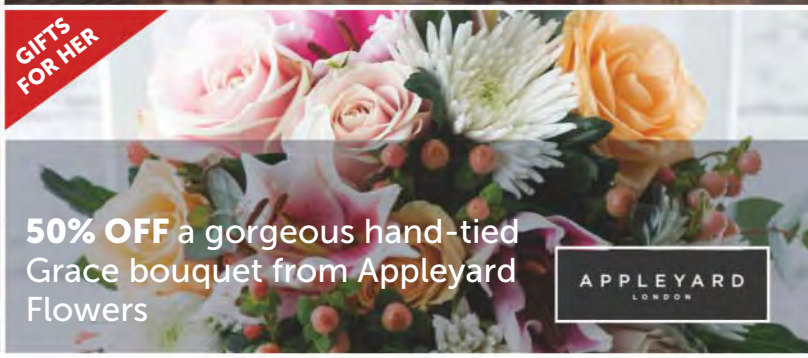

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DECEMBER 15, 2015-JANUARY 19, 2016

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Sacked... Mourinho

Tuesday December 15

GERMANY: Second-tier Heidenheim reach the last eight of the German Cup for the first time in their history with a 2-0 win at Erzgebirge Aue.
HOLLAND: Twente are banned from European competition for three years after they "deliberately misled" the Dutch FA over a deal to sell transfer-fee rights to an outside investor.
ITALY: Alessandria become the first third-tier side to reach the Italian Cup quarter-finals in more than 30 years with a 3-2 win over top-flight Genoa.

Wednesday December 16

BULGARIA: Litex Lovech are expelled from the league after their players walked off in protest over refereeing decisions during the weekend game against Levski Sofia.
CLUB WORLD CUP: Lucas Alario's 72nd-minute goal puts River Plate in the Final with a 1-0 victory over Sanfrecce Hiroshima. America of Mexico take fifth place by beating TP Mazembe 2-1.
FRANCE: Lyon play their last-ever game at the Stade de Gerland and beat Tours 2-1 in the League Cup.
PERU: Thirty-four years after their first title, Melgar win the league again, beating Sporting Cristal 5-4 on aggregate in the play-off Final.
SPAIN: Three-nil down from the first leg, Eibar beat Ponferradina 4-0 in the return to reach the last 16 of the Spanish Cup.
TURKEY: Samuel Eto'o is named interim player-coach of Antalyaspor. The 34-year-old Cameroonian striker has three matches to stake his claim for the job on a permanent basis.

Thursday December 17

AUSTRIA: Bayern Munich's David Alaba is named Austrian player of the year for a fifth successive time.
CLUB WORLD CUP: With Neymar and Lionel Messi both missing, Luis Suarez scores the first-ever Club World Cup hat-trick as Barcelona beat China's Guangzhou Evergrande 3-0 in their semi-final.
ENGLAND: Chelsea sack manager Jose Mourinho seven months after he led them to the league title.

Friday December 18

SPAIN: Vicente Del Bosque confirms he will leave his position as national coach after Euro 2016.

Saturday December 19

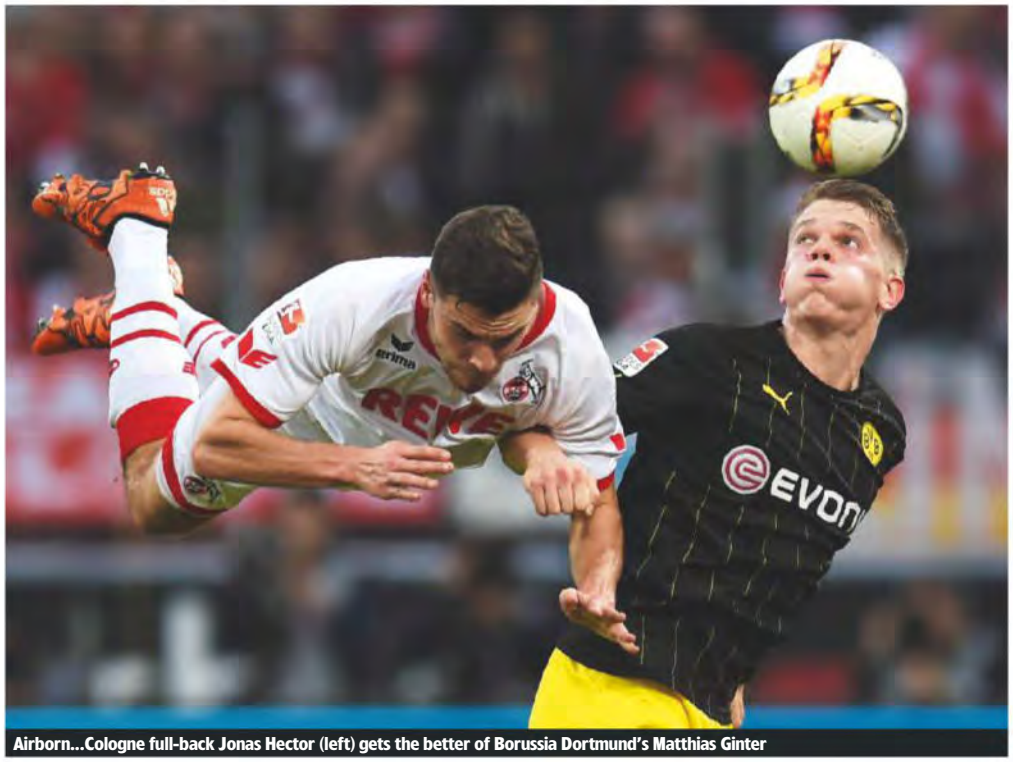
ENGLAND: Wayne Rooney plays his 500th game for Manchester United, but his day is spoiled as Norwich City win 2-1. Chelsea appoint Guus Hiddink as caretaker manager.
FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain win 3-0 at Caen to set a Ligue 1 record of 51 points at the halfway stage of the season and a club record of 28 games unbeaten in the league.
GERMANY: Stuttgart climb out of the relegation places with a 3-1 win over Wolfsburg. Bayern Munich beat Hanover 1-0 and go into the winter break eight points clear of Borussia Dortmund, who lose 2-1 at Cologne.
HONDURAS: Honduras Progreso are national champions for the first time as they beat Motagua on penalties, after drawing 4-4 on aggregate in the apertura Final.

Sunday December 20

CLUB WORLD CUP: Barcelona win their third world crown, beating River Plate 3-0 in the Final. Sanfrecce Hiroshima take third place with a 2-1 victory over Guangzhou Evergrande.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich confirm that Pep Guardiola will leave at the end of the season and he'll be replaced as coach by Carlo Ancelotti.
GUATEAMALA: Antigua GFC win the title for the first time in their 57-year history, beating Guastatoya 3-2 on aggregate in the apertura Final.
HOLLAND: PSV's Maxime Lestienne and Jeroen Zoet are arrested after a fight outside a party in Eindhoven, hours after Saturday's 3-2 Eredivisie win against PEC Zwolle.
PORTUGAL: Sporting Lisbon fail to win a club-record eighth consecutive league game, losing 1-0 at Uniao Madeira and surrendering top spot to Porto, who beat Academica 3-1.
SPAIN: Rayo Vallecano have two players sent off and surrender a 2-1 lead as they lose 10-2 to Real Madrid. Atletico Madrid miss the chance to go clear at the top of the table and have captain Gabi sent off in a 1-0 defeat at Malaga.

Monday December 21

BELGIUM: Gent suspend striker Benito Raman indefinitely after the 21-year-old chanted homophobic remarks about fans of Club Brugge following his side's 3-0 win over Kortrijk on Sunday.
ENGLAND: Second-place Arsenal win 2-1 at home to Manchester City, who are third.
FIFA: Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini are banned from all football for ➤


Airborn...Cologne full-back Jonas Hector (left) gets the better of Borussia Dortmund's Matthias Ginter

Brazil

TIM VICKERY

Rebirth of Flamego

Has Ramalho learnt from his Spanish lesson?

Something interesting is happening at Flamengo, Brazil's most popular team. Traditionally associated with populist grandstanding and administrative chaos, in the low-profile presidency of Eduardo Bandeira things have been done somewhat differently at the Rio club.

With priority being given to whipping finances into shape, results on the field have suffered. The supporters, however, appear to have understood.

In 2014, Flamengo flirted with relegation before finishing 10th and last year, after hinting at something better, they slipped to 12th – and all without the terrace revolt that would normally accompany such results. Indeed, Bandeira was even re-elected.

But fans will not wait for ever and 2016 is a key year, with Flamengo expected to be competitive once more. And the man charged with bringing about that change is Muricy Ramalho.

At the age of 60, Ramalho is one of Brazil's most experienced and successful coaches. He won the league three times with Sao Paulo (in 2006, 2007 and 2008) and turned down the national-team job after the 2010 World Cup before breaking his Libertadores Cup duck the following year with Santos.

However, later in 2011, came the defeat that changed everything as Santos' Club World Cup dream turned into a horror show. Swept aside in the Final by Barcelona, who were far superior than the 4-0 scoreline suggests, it was a crushing blow for Ramalho.

Santos' slaughter was both tactical and conceptual. It was also a defeat that seemed to point out the ways in which Brazilian football had gone wrong – and one which undermined everything that Ramalho had built his coaching career around.

"If you want to see a spectacle, go to the theatre" was one of Ramalho's favourite lines and he affected a bluff, no nonsense, almost philistine approach to coaching, constantly extolling the virtues of his own hard work in the process.

He liked to field big, strong line-ups that would grind out results, advancing set-piece by set-piece up the pitch until they could launch a throw-in, free-kick or corner into the penalty area for his giant forwards to attack. There was even a word invented for the way that his teams played: "Muricy-ball."

Decision...will Muricy Ramalho adopt a new style this season?

> "If you want to see a spectacle, go to the theatre"
> A famous Muricy Ramalho quote of old

Patient...fans have stuck by Flamengo but now want success

Ramalho's style of play was an uber-version of the direction that Brazilian football had taken, with its loss of aesthetic criteria and a lack of faith in passing the ball. By 2011, Brazilian football was obsessed with the physical development of the game and titles could no longer be won by possession-based teams filled with little midfielders.

Clearly no one told this to Barcelona or their coach at the time, Pep Guardiola – who stuck in the stiletto after the Final, saying that his team treated the ball the way that his grandparents told him Brazil used to. Ramalho, meanwhile, had endured a torrid 90 minutes. There was no evidence of his self-proclaimed hard work, as Lionel Messi and company danced through his team's defensive line time and time again. Ramalho squirmed on the touchline, his body language revealing that he would rather be anywhere else.

"We were beaten," said Santos president Luis Alvaro Ribeiro, "by a type of football that we didn't even know existed." It was a declaration of the incompetence of his coach to operate at that kind of level – after all, Ramalho had had months to study his opponent.

Since then, Ramalho has been making up for lost time. Out of work since leaving Sao Paulo last April, he went to Spain and visited Barcelona, offering warm praise for the club's commitment to a model of play.

Out of the firing line for a few months, and having had time to think things over, Ramalho now has the chance to start again at Flamengo.

But will he be brave enough to change his habits of the past? WS

eight years by the ethics committee.
SERBIA: Chelsea midfielder Nemanja Matic is Serbia's player of the year for a second successive season.

Tuesday December 22

USA: Toronto midfielder Michael Bradley is voted the US Soccer Federation Player of the Year.

Wednesday December 23

ARMENIA: Borussia Dortmund's Henrikh Mkhitaryan is named Armenian player of the year for the fifth time in a row – and sixth in total – ahead of Dijon's Gael Andonyan and Marcos Pizzelli of Aktobe.
BOSNIA: National coach Mehmed Bazdarevic has his contract extended until the end of their 2018 World Cup campaign, despite his side missing out on a place at Euro 2016.
SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP: The South Asian Football Federation Championship in India kicks off with Sri Lanka beating Nepal 1-0.

Thursday December 24

FRANCE: Lyon replace coach Hubert Fournier with his assistant Bruno Genesio until the end of the season.
SOMALIA: Despite having two players sent off, Horseed beat Heegan on penalties to win the Somali Super Cup.

Friday December 25

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP: Hosts India begin their South Asian Football Federation Championship campaign with a 2-0 victory over Sri Lanka.

Saturday December 26

BELGIUM: Gent go into a three-week break with a 2-0 defeat at Mechelen that cuts their league lead to three points.
ENGLAND: Arsenal lose 4-0 at Southampton as league leaders Leicester City go down 1-0 away to Liverpool.
THAILAND: Buriram United complete a domestic treble, beating Muangthong United 3-1 to add the Thai FA Cup to their Premier League and Thai League Cup triumphs.

Sunday December 27

MALAWI: Big Bullets beat CIVO United 3-0 to claim a record 66 points for a season and win a record-extending 12th league title.

Monday December 28

ENGLAND: Petr Cech sets a new Premier League record of 170 clean sheets as Arsenal beat Bournemouth 2-0 to go top of the table.
TURKEY: Following a 2-0 loss to Eskisehirspor, Genclerbirligi sack ➤

Cambodia

STEVE MENARY

Season start in doubt

Match fixing and financial woes threaten C-League

The new C-League season is due to kick off in February, but few are convinced that will happen as the size of the competition remains unclear. Supposedly comprising 12 teams, there were only 11 takers – and that was before Build Bright United pulled out with financial problems.

"It's supposed to start on February 6 but until the first whistle blows I wouldn't guarantee that," sighs Harry Varley, the community programme manager at defending champions Phnom Penh Crown.

PPC, who beat local rivals Nagaworld in the play-off at the end of 2015, are owned by Rithy Samnang, who has established a residential academy for young players and opened a new 6,500-seat stadium in June last year. However, as one veteran Asian coach says of Cambodia: "The place is riddled with corruption at every level."

PPC have got rid of players suspected in match-fixing in the past and in November the club publicly named and shamed seven players and four officials, who were all suspended indefinitely.

Then, just before Christmas, the club's Swiss coach, Sam Schweingruber, was badly hurt in a serious motorcycle accident. He had been involved in the suspensions, which came after a surprise dip in form before the two-legged play-off with Nagaworld, and is still recovering from his injuries in hospital.

Champions...Phnom Penh Crown celebrate winning the league last season

PPC took action on the basis of audio recordings, which were passed to the Football Federation of Cambodia. The FFC has not made any statement on the suspensions but, according to local sources, a key suspect, academy coach Bouy Dary, began working for the federation soon after being suspended.

Varley, who also coaches PPC's under-18 team, continues: "It's easy to come from Europe and say that corruption is not correct as it devalues the game.

"In my experience round the world, football reflects the culture and corruption is part of every day life here. Within a week of me getting here, we had to sit down with three under-16 national players to say if they were involved with any corruption they had no future at the club.

> "The domestic league is crawling along; it's in a terrible state. Corporates don't want to invest money because football has a bad name due to match-fixing" Former PPC academy director Tom Legg

Imports...PPC coach Sam Schweingruber and Shane Booysen

"There's boys in the academy here that could have a chance in Australia, or maybe Japan or even England, but they only understand Cambodia. Their geography is terrible and for them to take on board what we are saying is hard."

With Schweingruber in a Bangkok hospital, Samnang again turned to Europe and hired a Spanish interim coach, Oriol Mohedano. The club has also recruited

players from overseas.

Adriano Pellegrino was PPC's star performer until 2014, when the Australian attacking midfielder left for Udon Thani in Thailand. His replacement, Shane Booysen from South Africa, went on to score 24 goals in 20 games in 2015.

There has also been a small influx of Japanese and South Korean players recently, but there are still not as many overseas players in Cambodia as there are in other parts of South East Asia due to the country's poor wages.

The average salary of around $1,000 a month is inflated by overseas players, who can get more than $2,500.

PPC have 28 full-time players but spokesman Andy Brouwer says the side does not pay the biggest wages in Cambodian football. That distinction goes to Boeung Ket Angkor, who won the regular season title in 2015, and Cambodian Tiger.

PPC were only established in 2001 and are a nouveau riche side compared to older clubs such as Boeung Ket and Svay Reing, but a gap has emerged.

"You have to separate PPC and everyone else," says Tom Legg, who was PPC's academy director until October 2015. "The facilities they have, that model and the project they have is way ahead of every other club."

For other clubs to catch up, there needs to be major changes says Legg, who explains: "Match-fixing is a huge problem but not the biggest problem. There are structural problems with the clubs and the leagues, and major problems with the quality of the coaching."

To transform the C-League, Legg argues that the clubs need to split from the FFC and control their own league to increase its commercial power. "The domestic league is crawling along; it's in a terrible state," he adds. "Corporates don't want to invest money because football has a bad name due to match-fixing."

The latest allegations come at a bad time as commercial companies were showing interest. PPC signed a three-year sponsorship deal with local telecoms firm SMART, while Japanese industrial group Yanmar is sponsoring the national team.

For that interest to be sustained, and the Cambodian game to grow, major changes are necessary. WS

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

CAMBODIA
Formerly part of French Indochina and occupied by Japan in WWII, Cambodia gained independence in 1953 and joined FIFA a year later.

Size : 181,035 sq km
Population: 15.7 million
Capital: Phnom Penh
Language: Khmer
Religion: Buddhist

coach Yilmaz Vural – who has been in charge for one game and six days.

Tuesday December 29

ENGLAND: Second in the table Leicester City draw 0-0 at home to Manchester City, who are third.

Wednesday December 30

MEXICO: Cuauhtemoc Blanco, the 42-year-old former international forward who retired in April after winning the Mexican Cup with Puebla, is sworn in as mayor in the city of Cuernavaca.

SCOTLAND: Aberdeen miss the chance to go top of the Scottish Premiership for the second time in five days as they draw 0-0 at home to Partick Thistle.

SPAIN: Lionel Messi marks his 500th appearance for Barcelona with a goal in their 4-0 win against Real Betis.

Thursday December 31

SPAIN: Valencia coach Gary Neville is still without a win in La Liga as his side lose 1-0 at Villarreal.

Friday January 1

FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Marco Verratti wins the *Pallone Azzurro* ("blue ball") as the Italian player of the year, ahead of Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon and Lazio's Antonio Candreva, in a poll on the website of the Italian Football Federation.

JAPAN: Gamba Osaka retain the Emperor's Cup with a 2-1 victory over Urawa Reds.

Saturday January 2

ENGLAND: Wayne Rooney's winning goal in Manchester United's 2-1 victory at home to Swansea City sees him become the club's second-highest scorer of all time, with 238, and the second leading marksman in Premier League history, with 188.

FRANCE: Third division Chambly beat Ligue 1 side Reims 4-1 in the French Cup.

PORTUGAL: Porto lose in the league for the first time in 341 days, going down 2-0 to Sporting Lisbon, who replace them at the top of the table.

SCOTLAND: Dundee win 2-1 at home to neighbours Dundee United, who are now 11 points adrift at the bottom of the league.

SPAIN: Atletico Madrid beat bottom-of-La-Liga Levante 1-0 to go to of the table as Barcelona draw 0-0 with city rivals Espanyol.

Sunday January 3

FRANCE: Lacina Traore scores four and is then sent off at half-time as ➤

Monaco hit double figures for the first time in their history and beat St Jean Beaulieu 10-2 in the French Cup.
SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP: India win the regional title for a seventh time, beating Afghanistan 2-1 in the Final.
SPAIN: Real Madrid twice let the lead slip and have Mateo Kovacic sent off as they draw 2-2 at Valencia.

Monday January 4

GUINEA: CAF lifts the ban on Guinea hosting international games that was imposed in August 2014 due to the outbreak of the Ebola virus.
SPAIN: Real Madrid sack coach Rafael Benitez and replace him with Zinedine Zidane, who was in charge of the club's B team, Castilla. Former NBA star Steve Nash and Phoenix Suns owner Robert Sarver buy a controlling share of second-tier side Real Mallorca.

Tuesday January 5

CECAFA: Sudan will host this year's Council of East and Central Africa Football Association Senior Challenge Cup.
ENGLAND: Jordon Ibe gives Liverpool a 1-0 win at Stoke City in the first leg of their League Cup semi-final. Wayne Rooney is named England Player of the Year for 2015 by members of the supporters club, retaining the trophy and winning it for a fourth time. Stoke goalkeeper Jack Butland is the under-21 choice.
ITALY: Sampdoria win 3-2 at Genoa in the *Derby della Lanterna* as Serie A resumes after a two-week break.

Derby day delight...Sampdoria

Wednesday January 6

AUSTRALIA: Central Coast Mariners' striker Roy O'Donovan is banned for eight games following his head-butt on Wellington Phoenix midfielder Manny Muscat last week. He received

Australia

SIMON HILL

Bending the rules

Melbourne City benefit from Caceres transfer

They transformed the fortunes of Manchester City and have begun what they hope will be a similar revolution in the USA with New York City, but what of the third cog in the wheel of the Sheikh Mansour-backed City Football Group?

The fortunes of Melbourne City – who were Melbourne Heart until a buyout two years ago – have followed a similar pattern to the parent club. A steady start, with much of the previous infrastructure left in place; the odd big-name signing (for Robinho, read David Villa, albeit briefly); and the construction of a remarkable new training facility – a smaller version of the Etihad Academy at the club's base in Melbourne's northern suburbs.

City reached the A-League finals for only the second time last year, while their youth team were crowned champions. This season, however, that pace of progress has quickened, with City just three points behind leaders Brisbane Roar after 15 games. Meanwhile, their women's team won the Premiership without dropping a point.

But it's a low-profile transfer – in the global scheme of things – that could really shake up the Australian game and indicates that CFG are beginning to flex their financial muscle.

Anthony Caceres is a 23-year-old midfielder who has been developing nicely with Central Coast Mariners. Comfortable on the ball, with an eye for a pass and chipping in with the occasional spectacular goal, he's had "potential" stamped all over him for some time.

In January, it was announced he was joining Manchester City. But as good as Caceres is, he's not ready to replace Yaya Toure just yet. Instead, as many in Australia predicted, he's joined Melbourne City on loan, with Manchester City having paid his $325,000 release clause to the Mariners.

But although the Premier League club are happy, Caceres gets a good move and the Mariners receive cash, there is one big problem: transfers for monetary

Invincibles...Melbourne City women's team had a 100 per cent record in winning the Premiership

Unhappy...Sydney FC's Tony Pignata

Swap...Anthony Caceres (dark blue) in action for Central Coast Mariners against Melbourne City

only a yellow card at the time during Mariners' 3-1 win in the A-League.
ENGLAND: Everton beat Manchester City 2-1 at home in their League Cup semi-final first-leg tie.
FIFA: General-secretary Jerome Valcke has his 90-day suspension from all football-related activities, which came to an end on Tuesday, extended by 45 days.
ITALY: Juventus make it eight Serie A wins in a row and temporarily move into second place by beating Verona 3-0, before being overtaken by Internazionale and Napoli.
NIGERIA: Head of protocol for the country's football federation, Ibrahim Abubakar is shot dead by burglars at his home in Abuja.
SPAIN: Arda Turan and Aleix Vidal make their long-awaited debuts for Barcelona in a 4-1 Spanish Cup win over Espanyol. Athletic Bilbao come from two down to beat Villarreal 3-2.
TURKEY: Samuel Eto'o ends his stint as interim boss of Antalyaspor. He won his first two games before suffering two losses and a draw.

Thursday January 7

CAF: Gabon striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang is crowned CAF African Player of the Year. He beat Yaya Toure of Ivory Coast, who had been the winner for the past four years.
DR CONGO: Patrice Carteron's contract as coach of African champions TP Mazembe is not renewed following a poor showing at the Club World Cup in Japan.
FIFA: Michel Platini withdraws from the presidential election as his appeal against an eight-year ban means he will not be able "to fight on equal terms with the other candidates".
USA: Comedy actor Will Ferrell is named as a co-owner of new MLS franchise Los Angeles FC as part of a group that includes basketball legend Magic Johnson.

Friday January 8

COPA AMERICA: Panama and Haiti book places in June's competition with wins against Cuba (4-0) and Trinidad & Tobago (1-0) respectively.
FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain extend their lead at the Ligue 1 summit to 22 points with a 2-0 victory at home to Bastia.

Saturday January 9

FRANCE: Lyon mark their first game at their new Parc OL ➤

reward aren't allowed between clubs in the A-League. There are those who feel CFG have circumvented the regulations by using Manchester City as the third party in order to strengthen their Australian arm.

The move itself, it should be said, isn't illegal, and CFG have even been applauded in some quarters for managing to be "creative" with the rules. But there are others who aren't so happy.

Sydney FC CEO Tony Pignata tweeted on the day the loan was confirmed that "Caceres to [Melbourne] City is wrong. How can FFA allow this? There are no transfers between A-League clubs, yet it seems you can bypass."

FFA, the Australian game's governing body, admit there is a loophole and will conduct a review of the current procedures, probably at the end of the season.

If they decide to open up the domestic transfer market, then Melbourne City – with resources that far outstrip any other outfit in the competition – could probably buy any A-League player that they want; providing, of course, they can fit their wages into the stringent salary cap – which is another regulation causing headaches in its application.

Alternatively, if the federation block inter-club moves, they risk shutting off big opportunities for young Australian players like Caceres.

> "There are no transfers between A-League clubs, yet it seems you can bypass"
> Tony Pignata, Sydney FC CEO

City Football Group, as the A-League's financial heavyweights, are setting the agenda. Although they have global connections, they must deal with some fairly parochial rules. Last year, Melbourne City were refused permission to bring in Frank Lampard on a minimum wage – Manchester City would pick up the rest – as his salary value was deemed unfair within the cap.

The conundrum for FFA is whether to allow City – and the likes of their crosstown rivals Victory, Sydney FC and Western Sydney Wanderers – to fulfil their "big-city club" potential, or whether to commit to the notion of equality, which doesn't necessarily improve the level of play or, in an ultra-competitive market, commercial returns.

Either way, CFG are playing a smart game, and you wouldn't bet against them coming out on top. But are inter-club transfers good for football? That's a different argument entirely. WS

home with a 4-1 victory over Troyes.
ITALY: Francesco Totti appears as a substitute in Roma's 1-1 draw with Milan to make his 592nd appearance in Serie A and join Gianluca Pagliuca in joint-third place on the all-time league list.
SPAIN: Zinedine Zidane wins his first game in charge of Real Madrid, with Gareth Bale scoring a hat-trick in a 5-0 thrashing of Deportivo La Coruna. Lionel Messi gets a hat-trick as Barcelona beat Granada 4-0.

Sunday January 10

ENGLAND: Fourth-tier Oxford United beat Premier League side Swansea City 3-2 in the third round of the FA Cup. Bournemouth sign Benik Afobe from Wolverhampton Wanderers for a reported club record £10million.
FRANCE: Marseille draw 0-0 with Guingamp and extend their winless run at home to eight Ligue 1 games.
GREECE: Olympiakos set a club record with a 17th successive Super League win since the start of the season, beating Levadiakos 3-1.
ITALY: Internazionale lose 1-0 at home to Sassuolo and surrender top spot to Napoli, who win 5-1 at Frosinone. Juventus make it nine Serie A wins in a row and move within two points of Napoli by beating Sampdoria 2-1.
MEXICO: Apertura champions Tigres lose 1-0 to a stoppage-time winner from Toluca striker Fernando Uribe on the opening weekend of the clausura campaign.
PORTUGAL: Two-nil down to Braga, Sporting Lisbon fight back to win 3-2 as coach Jorge Jesus stretches his unbeaten run in home league games to 59, going back to March 2012.
SPAIN: Atletico Madrid return to the top of La Liga with a 2-0 win away to Celta Vigo.
SWEDEN: A Scandiniavian-based national squad end their two-game break in Abu Dhabi with a 3-0 win against Finland, following a 1-1 draw with Estonia.

Monday January 11

PORTUGAL: Jonas scores a hat-trick as Benfica beat Nacional 4-1 and play out the remaining 82 minutes of a game that was abandoned due to fog the previous evening.
SPAIN: Barcelona's Lionel Messi wins the FIFA Ballon d'Or for the world's best player. Real Betis sack Pepe Mel for a second time after an eight-game winless run.

Tuesday January 12

COLOMBIA: Former Galatasaray and Metz goalkeeper Faryd Mondragon is admitted to hospital ➤

South Korea

JOHN DUERDEN

Chinese threat to K League

Top stars head for riches overseas

It's cold when the South Korean season finishes in November and usually freezing when the new one starts in late February/early March. So while the players are off tanning themselves at training camps in Guam or Thailand, club officials and agents keep warm during the bitterest months trying to fend off the increasingly wealthy Chinese Super League clubs that come calling every time a campaign ends.

The K League is now in its fourth decade and Asia's oldest professional league has been its best, or very close to its best, from the very beginning. Six different clubs have won a combined total of 10 continental championships – double the total won by the next two most successful, Saudi Arabia and Japan.

China now has three, two of which have come in the last three years thanks to Guangzhou Evergrande. And of the $150million plus invested by the Cantonese club since 2010 on coaches such as Marcello Lippi and Luiz Felipe Scolari and players of the calibre of Robinho, Alessandro Diamanti and Dario Conca, perhaps the money best spent was the $2m on Kim Young-gwon in 2012. The South Korean central defender – hailed by Lippi as good enough for Manchester United when it was a bigger compliment than it is now – has been a mainstay of the all-conquering "Tigers".

Gone...Pohang Steelers' Kim Seung-dae has left for China

As other Chinese clubs try to catch up, they have also looked to Korea. At the end of the 2015 season, of the 15 teams that utilised the "Asian quota" – an extra spot reserved for Asian confederation imports – eight had Koreans, with more expected to follow.

The K League is seen as a market that provides not only value for money but players who are able to easily settle into China, both on and off the pitch. At the same time, most of the conglomerates, like Hyundai, Samsung and POSCO, that own the big Korean teams have been cutting back. The "citizen clubs" – nominally owned by metropolitan or provincial governments backed by corporate sponsors – have been struggling financially.

Consequently, K League clubs are increasingly unable to compete. In last year's summer transfer window, Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors – on their way to a second successive title and one of Asia's most successful teams – could not turn down a bid for Brazilian striker Edu, formerly of Schalke, from then second-tier Chinese club Heibei CFFC. The end of the

K LEAGUE CLASSIC 2016

1 Gwangju
2 Incheon United
3 Jeju United
4 Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors
5 Jeonnam Dragons
6 Pohang Steelers
7 Sangju Sangmu
8 Seongnam
9 Seoul
10 Suwon FC Suwon Samsung Bluewings
11 Ulsan Hyundai

Investment... Kim Young-gwon joined Guangzhou Evergrande for $2million

Return...Dejan Damjanovic is back at Seoul

2015 season saw two of Korea's brightest young talents, Kim Seung-dae of Pohang Steelers and Jeju United's Yoon Bitgaram, who have both appeared for the national team, joining newly promoted Yanbian Funde.

Chinese clubs see the K League as a great place to find non-Korean talent that has already demonstrated an ability to adapt to East Asia. Buying players that have impressed on the east side of the Yellow Sea is obviously much less risky than doing so directly from South America or Europe. Suwon FC's Brazilian striker Japa, who topped the goalscoring charts in Korea's second division, joined Chinese second-tier side Meizhou Hakka.

Suwon FC have now been promoted and are set for a fascinating clash this season with Suwon Samsung Bluewings, who were league runners-up last term but have had their funding reduced by their owners, Cheil, a Samsung subsidiary. Meanwhile, Seoul have welcomed back 34-year-old Montenegrin striker Dejan Damjanovic, the most successful foreign goalscorer in K League history before leaving for China in 2013. The most successful club in Asian history, Pohang Steelers, who have three continental titles to their name, have replaced 2002 World Cup striker Hwang Sun-hong with 2002 World Cup defender Choi Jin-cheul as coach but struggle to keep their best players.

One team trying to reverse the trend of losing its best domestic players are Jeonbuk Motors, whose domestic title last season came with Asian Champions League elimination at the quarter-final stage and left fans wondering what might have been achieved if Edu had stayed. Determined to challenge Guangzhou this time round, they have brought in former Cardiff City winger Kim Bo-kyung and international right-back Kim Chang-soo from Japanese club Matsumoto Yamaga and Kashiwa Reysol respectively.

The club even put out optimistic feelers to Fenerbahce and their Dutch striker Robin Van Persie, although the 32-year-old is far more likely to head for China. WS

Mexico

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER

Tigres aim for the top

Unheralded side seek place among the region's best

If you were to ask a European football fan who are the best team in the Americas at the moment, the most logical answer would be the usual suspects: Boca Juniors, River Plate, Santos, Corinthians. The name of Mexican club Tigres would not cross their mind, and yet they have all the merits to be part of the discussion.

For years, the results of the Monterrey-based club were far away from the outlandish amount of money that their owners – multinational cement giants Cemex – spent to strengthen the squad. Despite investing more than any other team in the Mexican league over the past decade, and filling their stadium every weekend, they had just one title to boast of in those 10 years: the Apertura 2011.

But in 2015 everything changed. For years, every time the club qualified for the Libertadores Cup, veteran coach Ricardo Ferretti decided to use an alternative team in the competition, deeming it a distraction for domestic success. But this time the board decided it would give the club a more international profile. Priority was given to the continental tournament and the team's performances served as a catalyst for an impressive year.

Tigers advanced easily in a group containing River Plate, Juan Aurich of Peru and Bolivian side San Jose Oruro, and then eliminated Universitario de Sucre in the round of 16 before squeezing past Emelec in the quarter-finals. The board then took advantage of a six-week break – to allow for the Copa America to be played – and decided to make what was an unprecedented investment for a Mexican side.

Although $6million was spent on repatriating international Javier Aquino from Villarreal, and another $10m to buy Liga MX starlet Jurgen Damm from Pachuca, the icing on the cake was of a completely unexpected nature.

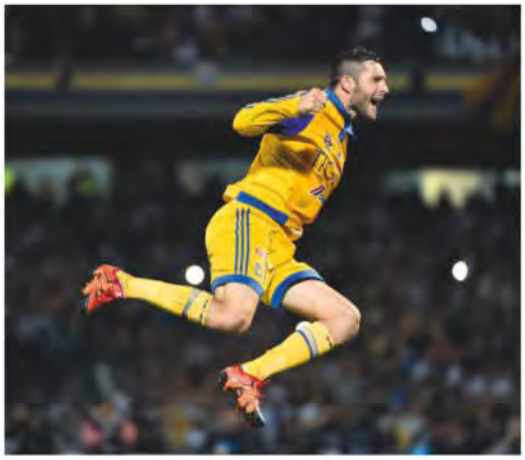
Previously, the few Europeans who have played in Mexico arrived in the twilight of their careers. So when Tigres announced the signing of Andre-Pierre Gignac, the news was greeted with astonishment. At 29, and after scoring 21 goals in his last season with Marseille, the France international was at the peak of his powers.

The results were immediate, with the new signings crucial in the semi-finals against an Internacional side who fielded Andres d'Alessandro, Jorge Valdivia and Lisandro Lopez. Tigres overcame a 2-1 deficit from the first leg in Brazil and then turned the game around with a 3-1 win in Monterrey.

Gignac, Aquino and Damm added firepower to a squad which already included Brazilian playmaker Rafael Sobis and Argentinian international goalkeeper Nahuel Guzman. In fact, the transformation had been such that there were those who considered Tigres as favourites in the Final against River Plate – a team they had left far behind in the group stage.

Ultimately the tie was a disappointment as Tigres failed to crack a solid Argentinian defence in a goalless first leg in Monterrey and then seemed overwhelmed by

"My philosophy is to attack with the ball and without it to defend. Why complicate something so simple?"
Tigres coach Ricardo Ferretti



Difference...the signing of France striker Andre-Pierre Gignac was a masterstroke

Joy...Tigres fans celebrate the apertura title triumph

the atmosphere in the return leg as they lost 3-0.

In the second half of the year, and despite playing in the CONCACAF Champions League, Tigres decided it was time to focus on their domestic league.

They began well but then suffered a dip in form that coincided with Ferretti being "loaned out" to the national team in the position of caretaker coach for two months.

After the Brazilian returned, the team never looked back and they finished the regular season in fifth place, before disposing of Jaguares and Toluca in the play-offs to reach the Final against Pumas.

After Tigres tore their rivals apart in winning their home leg 3-0, the return seemed a formality, but after losing 3-0 the game went to extra-time. Gignac then looked to have given the visitors the title – until Pumas equalised in the last minute and sent the tie to penalties. Tigres did not miss a single kick, while Guzman saved Pumas' last shot to give the team their fourth title.

While 2015 was historic for the team, 2016 now provides its own set of challenges. The main objective of Ferretti and his players this time will be to win the CONCACAF Champions League – in which they face MLS club Real Salt Lake in the quarter-finals in late February – and qualify for the Club World Cup.

If Tigres succeed, they will have an opportunity in Japan to prove they deserve to be in any conversation about who are the best team in the Americas. WS

after a reported suicide attempt. He became the oldest player to appear at a World Cup when he came on as a sub, at the age of 43, in Colombia's 4-1 win over Japan in 2014.

ENGLAND: Aston Villa win in the league for the first time since the opening day of the season, beating Crystal Palace 1-0.

SPAIN: Second-tier Mirandes win 3-0 at Deportivo La Coruna to seal a 4-1 aggregate victory in the Spanish Cup. Sevilla join them in the quarter-finals, beating rivals Real Betis 4-0.

Wednesday January 13

BELGIUM: Gent midfielder Sven Kums is named the domestic player of the year in the poll of sports journalists and football dignitaries.

ENGLAND: Joe Allen scores a last-minute equaliser for Liverpool in a draw 3-3 with Arsenal, who are now joint-top of the table with Leicester City, who win 1-0 away to Tottenham Hotspur. Leon Britton plays his 500th game for Swansea City as they go down 4-2 at home to Sunderland.

FIFA: Secretary-general Jerome Valcke, who is currently suspended from all football activities over his alleged involvement in a scheme to profit from World Cup ticket sales, is sacked by the governing body.

FRANCE: Cup holders Paris Saint-Germain beat Lyon 2-1 to reach the semi-finals. Marseille lose 2-1 at Toulouse in extra-time.

SPAIN: Valencia reappoint former director of football Jesus Garcia Pitarch to help club coach Gary Neville. Barcelona beat Espanyol 2-0 to reach the Spanish Cup quarter-finals, winning 6-1 on aggregate.

Thursday January 14

ITALY: Luciano Spalletti, who won the Italian Cup twice with Roma, returns as coach in place of Rudi Garcia, who was sacked after Saturday's 1-1 draw with Milan.

SPAIN: Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid are banned from signing players in the next two transfer windows for breaches of regulations regarding the registration of players under the age of 18. The penalty does not apply to the current window.

Friday January 15

PORTUGAL: League leaders Sporting Lisbon are held 2-2 at home by lowly Tondela.

Saturday January 16

AFRICAN NATIONS CHAMP: Hosts Rwanda kick off the competition for home-based players with a 1-0 win against Ivory Coast.

ENGLAND: Playing his 700th game for the club, John Terry scores an own goal and then grabs an equaliser in the eighth minute of injury time as Chelsea draw 3-3 with Everton.

Sunday January 17

ENGLAND: Manchester United win 1-0 at Liverpool with Wayne Rooney scoring his 176th goal for United to set a new Premier League record for one club. Arsenal go top of the table on goal difference with a 0-0 draw at Stoke City.

FRANCE: Saint-Etienne beat Lyon 1-0 in the 100th Rhone derby.

HOLLAND: PSV, who are second, win 2-0 at third-place Feyenoord.

ITALY: Juventus score four first-half goals to win 4-0 away to Udinese and secure a 10th league victory on the trot.

PORTUGAL: Porto slump to a shock 1-0 defeat at Vitoria Guimaraes to leave them five points off the pace in the league.

SPAIN: Luis Suarez scores his third Liga hat-trick for Barcelona as they beat Athletic Bilbao 6-0. Real Madrid beat Sporting Gijon 5-1.

Monday January 18

ENGLAND: Swansea City beat Watford 1-0 to move out of the relegation zone just hours after appointing Francesco Guidolin as head coach to work alongside interim manager Alan Curtis.

FRANCE: Bordeaux supporters are banned from attending Saturday's game at Nantes over fears of violence between rival fans.

GERMANY: A German court says former Bayern Munich president Uli Hoeness, who was convicted of tax evasion and jailed for three years in June 2014, has been approved for early release and will be freed on February 29.

GREECE: Olympiakos' run of 17 consecutive league wins since the start of the season comes to an end with a 1-1 draw at Platanias.

HOLLAND: Feyenoord striker Colin Kazim-Richards is suspended by the club for two weeks for threatening an *Algemeen Dagblad* newspaper reporter who questioned his attitude.

Tuesday January 19

CHILE: Jorge Sampaoli, who led the national side to victory in last year's Copa America, steps down as coach in the wake of a disagreement with football president Arturo Salah.

ITALY: Internazionale coach Roberto Mancini accuses Napoli boss Maurizio Sarri of using homophobic language towards him as they clash during Inter's 2-0 win in the Italian Cup quarter-finals. WS

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

DECEMBER 2015

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS

Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Keylor NAVAS (Real Madrid)	21 votes
Petr CECH (Arsenal)	6
Manuel NEUER (Bayern Munich)	4
Pepe REINA (Napoli)	4
Claudio BRAVO (Barcelona)	3
Samir HANDANOVIC (Internazionale)	3
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	3
Gianluigi BUFFON (Juventus)	2
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	1
Gianluigi DONNARUMMA (Milan)	1
Ralf FAHRMANN (Schalke)	1
Joe HART (Manchester City)	1
Marvin HITZ (Augsburg)	1
Carlos KAMENI (Malaga)	1
Fernando MUSLERA (Galatasaray)	1
Hakon OPDAL (Start)	1
Sergio RICO (Sevilla)	1

DEFENDERS

Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	19
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	15
Jerome BOATENG (Bayern Munich)	11
Dani ALVES (Barcelona)	9
Serge AURIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Laurent KOSCIELNY (Arsenal)	8
Philipp LAHM (Bayern Munich)	8
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	6
Matthias GINTER (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Filipe LUIS (Atletico Madrid)	6
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	6
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	6
Toby ALDERWEIRELD (Tottenham Hotspur)	5
Mats HUMMELS (Borussia Dortmund)	5
Jeison MURILLO (Internazionale)	5
Chris SMALLING (Manchester United)	5
Hector BELLERIN (Arsenal)	4
Alessandro FLORENZI (Roma)	4
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	4
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	4
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	3
DANILO (Real Madrid)	3
Matteo DARMIAN (Manchester United)	3
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	3
Javi MARTINEZ (Bayern Munich)	3
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	3
Victor RUIZ (Villarreal)	3
Raul ALBIOL (Napoli)	2
Christian FUCHS (Leicester City)	2
JUANFRAN (Atletico Madrid)	2
MAXWELL (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Nacho MONREAL (Arsenal)	2
Alex SANDRO (Juventus)	2
Kurt ZOUMA (Chelsea)	2
Davide ASTORI (Fiorentina)	1
Juan BERNAT (Bayern Munich)	1
Olivier BOSCAGLI (Napoli)	1
Alberto BOTIA (Olympiakos)	1
Nathaniel CLYNE (Liverpool)	1
Patrice EVRA (Juventus)	1
Roderic FILIPPI (GFC Ajaccio)	1
Christophe JALLET (Lyon)	1
Vincent KOMPANY (Manchester City)	1
Julian KORB (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Layvin KURZAWA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Sebastian LANGKAMP (Hertha Berlin)	1
Miguel LAYUN (Porto)	1
Stephan LICHTSTEINER (Juventus)	1
Dejan LOVREN (Liverpool)	1
MAICON (Roma)	1
Adam MASINIA (Bologna)	1
MAURICIO (Lazio)	1
MIRANDA (Internazionale)	1
NALDO (Wolfsburg)	1
Erik PIETERS (Stoke City)	1
Winston REID (West Ham United)	1
Sergi ROBERTO (Barcelona)	1
Gonzalo RODRIGUEZ (Fiorentina)	1
Bacary SAGNA (Manchester City)	1
Nelson SEMEDO (Benfica)	1
Martin SKRTEL (Liverpool)	1
Aytac SULU (Darmstadt)	1
Jonathan TAH (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Alex TELLES (Internazionale)	1
John TERRY (Chelsea)	1
Gregory VAN DER WIEL (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Jan VERTONGHEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Oscar WENDT (Borussia Monchengladbach)	1
Dries WUYTENS (Willem II)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Mesut OZIL (Arsenal)	19
Douglas COSTA (Bayern Munich)	14
Thomas MULLER (Bayern Munich)	14
Riyad MAHREZ (Leicester City)	13
Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	12
Angel DI MARIA (Paris Saint-Germain)	10
Philippe COUTINHO (Liverpool)	6
Andres INIESTA (Barcelona)	6
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	4
CASEMIRO (Real Madrid)	4
Paulo DYBALA (Juventus)	4
Hakan CALHANOGLU (Bayer Leverkusen)	3
Felipe MELO (Internazionale)	3
Henrykh MKHITARYAN (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Julian WEIGL (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Dele ALLI (Tottenham Hotspur)	2
Xabi ALONSO (Bayern Munich)	2
Francis COQUELIN (Arsenal)	2
JORGINHO (Napoli)	2
N'Golo KANTE (Leicester City)	2
Gary MEDEL (Internazionale)	2
Dmitri PAYET (West Ham United)	2
Miralem PJANIC (Roma)	2
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	2
TIAGO (Atletico Madrid)	2
Felipe ANDERSON (Lazio)	1
Andre ANDRE (Porto)	1
Ross BARKLEY (Everton)	1
Karim BELLARABI (Bayer Leverkusen)	1

Santi CAZORLA (Arsenal)	1
Kingsley COMAN (Bayern Munich)	1
Lassana DIARRA (Marseille)	1
Daniel DIDAVI (Stuttgart)	1
Matias FERNANDEZ (Fiorentina)	1
Nicolas GAITAN (Benfica)	1
Fredy GUARIN (Internazionale)	1
Yevhen KONOPLYANKA (Sevilla)	1
Erik LAMELA (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Juan MATA (Manchester United)	1
Blaise MATUIDI (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Paul POGBA (Juventus)	1
Dennis PRAET (Anderlecht)	1
Marco REUS (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Bryan RUIZ (Sporting Lisbon)	1
David SILVA (Manchester City)	1
Marc STENDERA (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
THIAGO Alcantara (Bayern Munich)	1
Yaya TOURE (Manchester City)	1
Borja VALERO (Fiorentina)	1
Arturo VIDAL (Bayern Munich)	1
Daniel WASS (Celta Vigo)	1
Georginio WIJNALDUM (Newcastle United)	1

FORWARDS

Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	26
NEYMAR (Barcelona)	20
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	18
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Borussia Dortmund)	17
Jamie VARDY (Leicester City)	17
Gonzalo HIGUAIN (Napoli)	6
Anthony MARTIAL (Manchester United)	6
NOLITO (Celta Vigo)	6
Cristiano RONALDO (Real Madrid)	6
Karim BENZEMA (Real Madrid)	4
Javier HERNANDEZ (Bayer Leverkusen)	4
Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Olivier GIROUD (Arsenal)	3
Antoine GRIEZMANN (Atletico Madrid)	3
Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	3
Marko ARNAUTOVIC (Stoke City)	2
Gareth BALE (Real Madrid)	2
Odion IGHALO (Watford)	2
Romelu LUKAKU (Everton)	2
Hatem BEN ARFA (Nice)	1
Kevin GAMEIRO (Sevilla)	1
Rudy GESTEDE (Aston Villa)	1
Lorenzo INSIGNE (Napoli)	1
Harry KANE (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Dirk KUYT (Feyenoord)	1
Massimo MACCARONE (Empoli)	1
Mario MANDZUKIC (Juventus)	1
Alexis SANCHEZ (Arsenal)	1
Islam SLIMANI (Sporting Lisbon)	1
Alex TEIXEIRA (Shakhtar Donetsk)	1

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

The members of ESM are: *A Bola* (Portugal), *Elf* (Holland), *Fanatik* (Turkey), *Frankfurter Allegmeine Zeitung* (Germany), *Goal News* (Greece), *Kicker* (Germany), *Marca* (Spain), *Nemzeti Sport* (Hungary), *So Foot* (France), *Sport* (Belgium), *Sport Express* (Russia), *De Telegraaf* (Holland), *TIPSbladet* (Denmark), *World Soccer* (England). More details of votes at **worldsoccer.com/votes**

Club football

WORLD

CLUB WORLD CUP

Played in Japan

Preliminary match

Dec10 - Yokohama
Sanfrecce Hiroshima (Jap) 2 (Minagawa 9, Shiotani 70)
Auckland City (NZ) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 19,421. **Ref:** Alioum (Cam)
Sanfrecce: Hayashi - Shiotani, Chiba, Mizumoto, Shimizu (Sasaki 65), Aoyama, Marutani, Kashiwa, Asano, Minagawa, Notsuda (Shibasaki 14; Douglas 52).
Auckland: Spoonley - Djordjevic, Berlanga, Bilen (Tade 71), Iwata, Hudson-Wihongi, Lea'alafa, De Vries, Joao Moreira (Lewis 84), Alvaro, Kim Dae-wook (White 78).

Quarter-finals

Dec13 - Osaka
America (Mex) 1 (Peralta 55)
Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn) 2 (Zheng Long 80, Paulinho 90+3)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 18,772. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
America: Munoz - Paul Aguilar, Goltz, Pablo Aguilar, Samudio, Andrade, Guerrero, Sambueza, Quintero (Arroyo 83), Benedetto (Martinez 81), Peralta.
Guangzhou: Li Shuai - Huang Bowen (Gao Lin 66), Zhang Linpeng, Kim Young-gwon, Feng Xiaoting, Ricardo Goulart, Paulinho, Zou Zheng - Zheng Zhi, Elkeson (Yu Hanchao 79), Robinho (Zheng Long 46).

Dec13 - Osaka
TP Mazembe (DRC) 0
Sanfrecce Hiroshima 3 (Shiotani 44, Chiba 56, Asano 78)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 23,609. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
TP Mazembe: Gbohouo - Kimwaki, Diarra, Coulibaly, Boateng (Bolingi 69), Sinkala (Kalaba 63), Frimpong, Assale, Singuluma (Ulimwengu 46), Traore, Samatta.
Sanfrecce: Hayashi - Kashiwa, Shiotani, Chiba, Sasaki, Kazuyuki Morisaki, Aoyama, Chajima, Mikic (Mizumoto 82), Sato (Asano 75), Douglas (Minagawa 87).

● *Byes to semi-finals: Barcelona (Spa), River Plate (Arg)*

5th-place match

Dec16 - Osaka
America 2 (Benedetto 19, Zuniga 28)
TP Mazembe 1 (Kalaba 43)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 11,686. **Ref:** Faghani (Irn)
America: Munoz - Paul Aguilar, Pimentel, Alvarado, Mares, Martinez, Andrade (Goltz 84), Guerrero, Arroyo, Benedetto (Zuniga 21), Peralta (Sambueza 66).
TP Mazembe: Gbohouo - Frimpong (Chongo 61), Kimwaki, Coulibaly, Mwepu, Bokadi (Diarra 46), Adjei, Traore, Ulimwengu (Assale 72), Kalaba, Samatta.

Semi-finals

Dec16 - Osaka
Sanfrecce Hiroshima 0
River Plate 1 (Alario 72)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 20,133. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Sanfrecce: Hayashi - Shimizu, Shiotani, Sasaki, Chiba, Kashiwa (Mikic 61), Douglas, Kazuyuki Morisaki, Aoyama, Chajima (Sato 76), Minagawa (Asano 66).
River Plate: Barovero - Mercado (Mayada 85), Maidana, Alvarez Balanta, Vangioni, Kranevitter, Sanchez, Pisculichi (Viudez 64), Ponzio (Gonzalez 57), Mora, Alario.

Dec17 - Yokohama
Barcelona 3 (Suarez 39, 50, pen 67)
Guangzhou Evergrande 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 63,870. **Ref:** Aguilar (ESv)
Barcelona: Bravo - Daniel Alves, Pique, Mascherano, Jordi Alba (Adriano 76), Rakitic, Busquets, Iniesta (Samper 81), Sergi Roberto (Sandro 72), Suarez, Munir.
Guangzhou: Li Shuai - Zou Zheng (Li Xuepeng 35), Kim Young-gwon, Feng Xiaoting, Zhang Linpeng, Zheng Zhi, Paulinho, Huang Bowen, Ricardo Goulart, Zheng Long (Yu Hanchao 56), Elkeson (Gao Lin 67).

3rd-place match

Dec 20 - Yokohama
Sanfrecce Hiroshima 2 (Douglas 70, 83)
Guangzhou Evergrande 1 (Paulinho 4)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 47,968. **Ref:** Conger (NZ)
Sanfrecce: Hayashi - Miyahara, Shiotani, Mizumoto, Marutani, Shimizu (Sasaki 87), Chajima, Mikic (Kashiwa 67), Aoyama, Sato (Douglas 58), Asano.
Guangzhou: Li Shuai - Li Xuepeng, Kim Young-gwon, Zhang Linpeng, Mei Fang, Zheng Zhi, Paulinho, Huang Bowen (Yu Hanchao 86), Ricardo Goulart (Liu Jian 81), Elkeson (Zheng Long 46), Gao Lin.

Final

Dec 20 - Yokohama
River Plate 0
Barcelona 3 (Messi 36, Suarez 49, 68)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 66,853. **Ref:** Faghani (Irn)
River Plate: Barovero - Mercado, Maidana, Alvarez Balanta, Vangioni, Kranevitter, Sanchez, Viudez (Driussi 56), Ponzio (Gonzalez 46), Mora (Martinez 46), Alario.
Barcelona: Bravo - Daniel Alves, Pique, Mascherano (Vermaelen 81), Jordi Alba, Rakitic (Sergi Roberto 67), Busquets, Iniesta, Messi, Suarez, Neymar (Mathieu 89).

Previous winners

2000	Corinthians (Bra)
2005	Sao Paulo (Bra)
2006	Internacional (Bra)
2007	Milan (Ita)
2008	Manchester United (Eng)
2009	Barcelona (Spa)
2010	Internazionale (Ita)
2011	Barcelona (Spa)
2012	Corinthians (Bra)
2013	Bayern Munich (Ger)
2014	Real Madrid (Spa)

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round draw

Arsenal (Eng) v Barcelona (Spa) (Feb 23 & Mar 16)
Benfica (Por) v Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) (Feb 16 & Mar 9)
Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) v Manchester City (Eng) (Feb 24 & Mar 15)
Gent (Blg) v Wolfsburg (Ger) (Feb 17 & Mar 8)
Juventus (Ita) v Bayern Munich (Ger) (Feb 23 & Mar 16)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) v Chelsea (Eng) (Feb 16 & Mar 9)
PSV Eindhoven (Hol) v Atletico Madrid (Spa) (Feb 24 & Mar 15)
Roma (Ita) v Real Madrid (Spa) (Feb 17 & Mar 8)

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st knockout round draw

Anderlecht (Blg) v Olympiakos (Gre)
Augsburg (Ger) v Liverpool (Eng)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) v Porto (Por)
Fenerbahce (Tur) v Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)[1]
Fiorentina (Ita) v Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
Galatasaray (Tur) v Lazio (Ita)
Marseille (Fra) v Athletic Bilbao (Spa)
Midtjylland (Den) v Manchester United (Eng)
Saint-Etienne (Fra) v Basle (Swi)
Sevilla (Spa) v Molde (Nor)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) v Schalke (Ger)
Sion (Swi) v Sporting Braga (Por)[2]
Sparta Prague (CzR) v Krasnodar (Rus)
Sporting Lisbon (Por) v Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Valencia (Spa) v Rapid Vienna (Aut)
Villarreal (Spa) v Napoli (Ita)
1st legs - Feb18 ([1]Feb16); 2nd legs - Feb 25 ([2]Feb 24)

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Preliminary round draw

Cesar Vallejo (Per) v Sao Paulo (Bra)
Huracan (Arg) v Caracas (Ven)
Independiente del Valle (Ecu) v Guarani (Par)
Oriente Petrolero (Bol) v Santa Fe (Col)
Puebla (Mex) v Racing (Arg)
River Plate (Uru) v Universidad de Chile (Chl)
1st legs - Feb 2-4; 2nd legs - Feb 9-11

Group stage draw

Group 1
River Plate (Arg)
The Strongest (Bol)
Trujillanos (Ven)
Cesar Vallejo OR Sao Paulo

Group 2
Nacional (Uru)
Palmeiras (Bra)
Rosario Central (Arg)
River Plate (Uru) OR Universidad de Chile

Group 3
Boca Juniors (Arg)
Bolivar (Bol)
Deportivo Cali (Col)
Puebla OR Racing

Group 4
Atletico Nacional (Col)
Penarol (Uru)
Sporting Cristal (Per)
Huracan OR Caracas

Group 5
Atletico Mineiro (Bra)
Colo Colo (Chl)
Melgar (Per)
Independiente del Valle OR Guarani

Group 6
Gremio (Bra)
LDU Quito (Ecu)
San Lorenzo (Arg)
Toluca (Mex)

Group 7
Emelec (Ecu)
Olimpia (Par)
Pumas UNAM (Mex)
Tachira (Ven)

Group 8
Cerro Porteno (Par)
Cobresal (Chl)
Corinthians (Bra)
Oriente Petrolero OR Santa Fe

Ties to be played Feb16-Apr 21

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 1st knockout round (last16)*

Previous winners (most recent)

2004	Once Caldas (Col)
2005	Sao Paulo (Bra)
2006	Internacional (Bra)
2007	Boca Juniors (Arg)
2008	LDU Quito (Ecu)
2009	Estudiantes (Arg)
2010	Internacional (Bra)
2011	Santos (Bra)
2012	Corinthians (Bra)
2013	Atletico Mineiro (Bra)
2014	San Lorenzo (Arg)
2015	River Plate (Arg)

BOLIVIA

2015-16 APERTURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sport Boys (C)	22	14	3	5	36	17	45
Bolivar	22	14	1	7	52	36	43
The Strongest	22	11	6	5	45	26	39
Universitario	22	10	6	6	44	43	36
Oriente	22	9	7	6	32	30	34
Wilstermann	22	8	9	5	34	30	33
Ciclon	22	9	3	10	31	38	30
Blooming	22	6	7	9	32	38	25
San Jose	22	6	6	10	31	37	24
Nacional	22	5	6	11	38	48	21
Petrolero	22	5	4	13	20	35	19
Real Potosi	22	5	2	15	31	48	17

No relegation after apertura

COLOMBIA

2015 CLAUSURA – REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Nacional (Q)	20	14	3	3	33	7	45
Junior (Q)	20	11	3	6	31	23	36
Tolima (Q)	20	10	5	5	23	14	35
I Medellin (Q)	20	10	5	5	23	18	35
O Caldas (Q)	20	9	7	4	25	14	34
A Petrolera (Q)	20	9	6	5	18	12	33
Dep Cali (Q)	20	9	5	6	30	28	32
Santa Fe (Q)	20	8	7	5	26	15	31
Patriotas	20	9	4	7	24	19	31
Dep Pasto	20	9	3	8	25	26	30
Millonarios	20	7	7	6	20	16	28
La Equidad	20	8	4	8	22	27	28
Envigado	20	6	7	7	18	18	25
Aguilas D'das	20	5	9	6	17	16	24
Cortulua	20	6	6	8	20	20	24
Uniauto'ma (R)	20	6	4	10	18	26	22
Boyaca Chico	20	4	5	11	10	29	17
Atletico Huila	20	3	7	10	12	28	16
Cucuta (R)	20	3	3	14	15	37	12
Jaguares	20	2	4	14	18	35	10

The top 8 qualified for the clausura championship play-offs; relegation determined by points-per-game average over 3 most recent seasons

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Nov 28/29; 2nd legs - Dec 5/6
Alianza Petrolera v Independiente Medellin 0-2, 0-4 (agg 0-6)
Deportivo Cali v Atletico Nacional 0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
Once Caldas v Tolima 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
Santa Fe v Junior 2-1, 1-3 (agg 3-4)

Semi-finals

1st legs - Dec10; 2nd legs - Dec13
Independiente Medellin v Atletico Nacional 1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Tolima v Junior 0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)

2015 Clausura Championship Final

1st leg - Dec16; 2nd leg - Dec 20
Junior v Atletico Nacional 2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Atletico Nacional 3-2 on pens)

Previous champions (most recent)

2011	Atletico Nacional (apertura) Junior (clausura)
2012	Santa Fe (apertura) Millonarios (clausura)
2013	Atletico Nacional (apertura) Atletico Nacional (clausura)
2014	Atletico Nacional (apertura) Santa Fe (clausura)
2015	Deportivo Cali (apertura)

ECUADOR

2015 2ND STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Emelec[1]	22	12	7	3	42	20	43
LDU Quito	22	13	3	6	42	26	42
Univ Catolica	22	12	4	6	35	27	40
Independiente	22	11	4	7	45	30	37
Aucas	22	8	8	6	27	25	32
River Plate	22	7	7	8	26	30	28
LDU Loja[2] (R)	22	8	3	11	28	33	26
Dep Cuenca	22	6	7	9	21	27	25
Barcelona[3]	22	8	7	7	23	21	24
Mushuc Runa	22	5	9	8	26	33	24
El Nacional[2]	22	6	3	13	17	34	20
Dep Quito[4] (R)	22	3	4	15	15	41	5

Relegation determined by total points gained in combined 1st/2nd stage table
[1]As 2nd stage winners, Emelec went into the 2015 Championship Final with 1st stage winners LDU Quito
[2]1pt deducted
[3]7pts deducted
[4]8pts deducted

2015 Championship Final

1st leg - Dec16; 2nd leg - Dec 20
Emelec v LDU Quito 3-1, 0-0 (agg 3-1)

Previous champions (most recent)

2009	Deportivo Quito
2010	LDU Quito
2011	Deportivo Quito
2012	Barcelona
2013	Emelec
2014	Emelec

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary & play-off rounds entrants

Adelaide United (Aus), Al Ittihad (Sau), Al Jazira (UAE), Al Sadd (Qat), Al Shabab (UAE), Al Wehdat (Jor), Bunyodkor (Uzb), Chonburi (Tha), El Jaish (Qat), FC Tokyo (Jap), Hanoi T&T (Vie), Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mly), Kitchee (HK), Mohun Bagan (Ind), Muangthong United (Tha), Naft Tehran (Irn), Pohang Steelers (SKo), Shandong Luneng (Chn), Shanghai SIPG (Chn), Tampines Rovers (Sin), Yangon United (Mya)

Group stage draw

Group A
Al Nasr (UAE)
Lokomotiv Tashkent (Uzb)
Sepahan (Irn)
Play-off round winner

Group B
Al Nassr (Sau)
Lekhwiya (Qat)
Zob Ahan (Irn)
Play-off round winner

Group C
Al Hilal (Sau)
Pakhtakor (Uzb)
Tractor Sazi (Irn)
Play-off round winner

Group D
Al Ahli (Sau)
Al Ain (UAE)
Nasaf Qarshi (Uzb)
Play-off round winner

Group E
Binh Duong (Vie)
Jeonbuk Motors (SKo)
Jiangsu Sainty (Chn)
Play-off round winner

Group F
Buriram United (Tha)
Sanfrecce Hiroshima (Jap)
Seoul (SKo)
Play-off round winner

Group G
Gamba Osaka (Jap)
Melbourne Victory (Aus)
Suwon Bluewings (SKo)
Play-off round winner

Group H
Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn)
Sydney (Aus)
Urawa Red Diamonds (Jap)
Play-off round winner

Ties to be played Feb 23-May 4

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 1st knockout round (last16)*

AFC CUP

1st qualifying round

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
K-Elec (Pak) (Q)	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Druk Utd (Bhu)	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Kh'khon (Mon)	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

K-Electric qualified for the 2nd qualifying round

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SJ D'di (Ban) (Q)	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
Alga (Kyr)	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Benfica (Mco)	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi qualified for the group stage

2nd qualifying round draw

Ahli Al Khalil (Pal) v Khujand (Taj)
Al Hidd (Bhr) v K-Electric
Al Wahda (Syr) v Balkan (Tkm)
Tripoli (Leb) v Alay Osh (Kyr)
Single-leg ties, to be played Feb 9

Group stage draw

Group A
Al Ahed (Leb)
Altyn Asyr (Tkm)
Al Hidd OR K-Electric
Al Wehdat (Jor) OR Al Jazeera (Jor)

Group B
Al Faisaly (Jor)
Istiklol (Taj)
Naft Al Wasat (Irq)
Tripoli OR Alay Osh

Group C
Al Orouba (Oma)
Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq)
Shabab Al Dhahiriya (Pal)
Al Wahda OR Balkan

Group D
Al Jaish (Syr)
Al Muharraq (Bhn)
Fanja (Oma)
Ahli Al Khalil OR Khujand

Group E
Ceres (Phi)
Selangor (Mly)
Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi
Tampines Rovers (Sin) OR Warriors (Sin)

Group F
Balestier Khalsa (Sin)
Kaya (Phi)
New Radiant (Mdv)
Kitchee (HK) OR other Hong Kong rep

Group G
Maziya (Mdv)
South China (HK)
Mohun Bagan (Ind) OR other India rep
Yangon United (Mya) OR Yadanarbon (Mya)

Group H
Ayeyawady United (Mya)
Bengaluru (Ind)
Lao Toyota (Lao)
Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mly) OR Pahang (Mly)

Ties to be played Feb 23-May11

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 1st knockout round (last16)*

INDIA (Super League)

2015 Championship Final
Dec 20: Goa 2 Chennaiyin 3.

Previous champion
2014 Atletico de Kolkata

MALDIVES

2015 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Radiant (C)	14	10	3	1	27	13	33
TC Sports	14	8	5	1	26	12	29
Eagles	14	6	6	2	24	13	24
Maziya	14	6	3	5	26	20	21
Victory	14	5	2	7	23	23	17
Valencia	14	5	1	8	25	27	16
BG Sports	14	3	4	7	18	26	13
Mahib'hoo (R)	14	0	2	12	12	47	2

Previous champions (most recent)
2012 New Radiant
2013 New Radiant
2014 New Radiant

TURKMENISTAN

2015 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Altyn Asyr (C)	36	29	5	2	81	21	92
Balkan	36	20	8	8	75	36	68
Asgabat	36	18	5	13	57	42	59
Sagadam	36	16	10	10	59	36	58
Ahal	36	15	10	11	68	55	55
HTTU	36	12	10	14	50	54	46
Hazyna	36	12	8	16	54	52	44
Merw	36	11	9	16	39	50	42
Energetik	36	5	10	21	27	74	25
Dasoguz (R)	36	3	3	30	16	106	12

Previous champions (most recent)
2012 Balkan
2013 HTTU
2014 Altyn Asyr

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw

AS Douanes (Sen) v Horoya (Gui)
Ashanti Gold (Gha) v MO Bejaia (Alg)
Cercle de Joachim (Mrs) v Young Africans (Tan)
Chicken Inn (Zim) v Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf)
Club Africain (Tun) v AS Tanda (IvC)
CotonTchad N'Djamena (Chd) v ASEC Abidjan (IvC)
Gor Mahia (Ken) v CNaPS Sport (Mad)
Lioli (Les) v Vital'O (Bdi)
Mafunzo (Zan) v AS Vita (DRC)
Mangasport (Gab) v Etoile du Congo (Con)
Mbabane Swallows (Swa) v APR (Rwa)
Mochudi Centre Chiefs (Bot) v Ferroviario Maputo (Moz)
Nimba United (Lbr) v Union Douala (Cam)
Olympique Khouribga (Mor) v Gamtel (Gam)
Onze Createurs (Mli) v Al Ahli Tripoli (Lby)
Recreativo do Libolo (Ang) v Racing Micomeseng (EqG)
Saint George (Eth) v St Michel United (Sey)
Stade Malien (Mli) v Racing Bobo Dioulasso (BuF)
Vipers (Uga) v Enyimba (Nga)
Volcan (Com) v Kaizer Chiefs (SAf)
Warri Wolves (Nga) v Sporting Praia Cruz (STP)
Wydad Casablanca (Mor) v AS Douanes (Nig)
Zesco United (Zam) v Al Ghazal (SSu)
1st legs - Feb12-14; 2nd legs - Feb 26-28

● *Winners qualify for the1st round (last 32), to which the following teams have received byes: AC Leopards (Con), Al Ahly (Egy), Al Hilal (Sud), Al Merrikh (Sud), Coton Sport (Cam), ES Setif (Alg), Etoile Sahel (Tun), TP Mazembe (DRC), Zamalek (Egy)*

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round draw

Al Ittihad (Lby) v Sonidep (Nig)
Bakaridjan (Mli) v Stade Gabesien (Tun)
Defence Force (Eth) v Misr El Makasa (Egy)
Diables Noirs (Con) v Africa Sports (IvC)
Fomboni (Com) v Atletico Olympic (Bdi)
Harare City (Zim) v AS Adema (Mad)
JKU (Zan) v Gaborone United (Bot)
Kawkab Marrakech (Mor) v USFA (BuF)
Khartoum SC (Sud) v SC Villa (Uga)
Lightstars (Sey) v Bidvest Wits (SAf)
Nasarawa United (Nga) v Generation Foot (Sen)
Police (Rwa) v Atlabara (SSu)
Renaissance (Chd) v New Star (Cam)
Sagrada Esperanca (Ang) v Ajax Cape Town (SAf)
SC Gagnoa (IvC) v USFAS (Mli)
St Eloi Lupopo (DRC) v Bandari (Ken)
UMS de Loum (Cam) v Deportivo Mongomo (EqG)
Vita Club Mokanda (Con) v Akwa United (Nga)
Wallidan (Gam) v MC Oran (Alg)[1]
1st legs - Feb12-14; 2nd legs - Feb 26-28
[1]Wallidan have withdrawn – MC Oran go through

● *Winners qualify for the1st round (last 32), to which the following teams have received byes: Al Ahly Shendi (Sud), AS Kaloum (Gui), Azam (Tan), Barrack Young Controllers II (Lbr), CF Mounana (Gab), CS Constantine (Alg), Don Bosco (DRC), ENPPI (Egy), Esperance (Tun), FUS Rabat (Mor), Liga Desportiva Maputo (Moz), Medeama (Gha), Zanaco (Zam)*

MALAWI

2015 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Big Bullets (C)	28	20	6	2	52	24	66
MAFCO	28	15	5	8	42	29	50
Blue Eagles	28	13	9	6	45	29	48
Wanderers	28	12	9	7	36	29	45
Silver Strikers	28	12	8	8	37	26	44
Azam Tigers	28	11	9	8	33	28	42
Red Lions	28	11	8	9	42	39	41
Kamuzu Ba'ks	28	9	9	10	27	27	36
Moyale Ba'ks	28	8	10	10	28	27	34
CIVO United	28	9	7	12	25	29	34
EPAC United	28	8	6	14	31	47	30
Mzuni	28	8	5	15	22	35	29
Dedza YS (R)	28	8	5	15	28	48	29
Airborne (R)	28	6	7	15	21	37	25
Wizards (R)	28	4	9	15	25	40	21

Previous champions (most recent)
2012-13 Silver Strikers
2013-14 Silver Strikers
2014 Big Bullets

SEYCHELLES

2015 – FINAL[1]

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St Michel U (C)	17	12	2	3	38	23	38
St Louis Suns	17	11	0	6	35	25	33
Foresters	17	9	4	4	28	21	31
La Passe	17	8	5	4	21	14	29
Cote d'Or	17	8	1	8	23	25	25
The Lions	16	5	5	6	18	19	20
Revengers	17	3	7	7	19	25	16
Lightstars	17	3	7	7	17	28	16
Anse Reunion	16	3	3	10	18	29	12
Nthn Dynamo	15	3	2	10	14	22	11

[1]Remaining games not played because the champions had already been decided and there is no relegation this season as the division is being expanded

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Los Angeles Galaxy (USA) v Santos Laguna (Mex)
Queretaro (Mex) v DC United (USA)
Seattle Sounders (USA) v America (Mex)
Tigres (Mex) v Real Salt Lake (USA)
1st legs - Feb 23/24; 2nd legs - Mar1/2

BELIZE

2015-16 Apertura Championship Final
1st leg - Dec 20; 2nd leg - Dec 27
Verdes v Police United 0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)

COSTA RICA

2015-16 Apertura Championship Final
1st leg - Dec 20; 2nd leg - Dec 23
Saprissa v Alajuelense 2-0, 2-1 (agg 4-1)

EL SALVADOR

2015-16 Apertura Championship Final
Dec 20: Alianza 1 FAS 0.

GUATEMALA

2015-16 Apertura Championship Final
1st leg - Dec17; 2nd leg - Dec 20
Guastatoya v Antigua 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)

HAITI

2015 Clausura Championship Final
1st leg - Dec 30; 2nd leg -Jan 3 (2016)
FICA v Baltimore 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0)

HONDURAS

2015-16 Apertura Championship Final
1st leg - Dec12; 2nd leg - Dec19
Motagua v Honduras de El Progreso
3-3, 1-1 (aet) (agg 4-4, Honduras 4-1 on pens)

NICARAGUA

2015-16 Apertura Championship Final
1st leg - Dec 6; 2nd leg - Dec19
Diriangen v UNAN Managua 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)

PUERTO RICO

2015 Championship Final
Dec 19: Guayama 2 Criollos 4.

OCEANIA

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group stage draw

Group A
Amicale (Van), Auckland City (NZ), Lae City Dwellers (PNG), Solomon Warriors (Sol)

Group B
Hekari United (PNG), Lossi (NC), Suva (Fij), Team Wellington (NZ)

Group C
Magenta (NC), Nadi (Fij), Tefana (Tah), *Preliminary round group winner*

● *The 3 group winners and the runner-up with the best record will qualify for semi-finals; tournament to be played in New Zealand, Apr 8-23*

Internationals

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP
(South Asian Football Federation)

Played in Thiruvananthapuram, India

Group A
Dec 23
Nepal 0
Sri Lanka 1 (Rifnas 88)
HT: 0-0

Dec 25
Sri Lanka 0
India 2 (R Singh 52, 74)
HT: 0-0

Dec 27
India 4 (Borges 26, Chhetri 67, Lallianzuala 81, 90)
Nepal 1 (Magar 3)
HT: 1-1

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
India (Q)	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Sri Lanka (Q)	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Nepal	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

Group B
Dec 24
Maldives 3 (Imaz 8, Asadhulla Abdulla 31, Ashfaq 70)
Bhutan 1 (Tshering Dorji 18)
HT: 2-1

Dec 24
Afghanistan 4 (Saighani 29, Shayesteh 32, Z Amiri 40, Amani 70)
Bangladesh 0
HT: 3-0

Dec 26
Bangladesh 1 (Biswas 87)
Maldives 3 (Ashfaq pen 41, Naiz 89, Nashid 90+1)
HT: 0-1

Dec 26
Bhutan 0
Afghanistan 3 (Amani 15, 53, Saighani 45)
HT: 0-2

Dec 28
Bhutan 0
Bangladesh 3 (Barman 8, Rony pen 24, 67)
HT: 0-2
Sent off: C Dorji (Bhutan) 23

Dec 28
Afghanistan 4 (Shayesteh 20, Popalzay 34, 54, Hatifi 51)
Maldives 1 (Fasir 32)
HT: 2-1

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Afghanistan (Q)	3	3	0	0	11	1	9
Maldives (Q)	3	2	0	1	7	6	6
Bangladesh	3	1	0	2	4	7	3
Bhutan	3	0	0	3	1	9	0

● *The top 2 in both groups qualified for the semi-finals*

Semi-finals
Dec 31
India 3 (Chhetri 23, Lalpekhlua 33, 65)
Maldives 2 (Nashid 45, Amdhan Ali 75)
HT: 2-1

Dec 31
Afghanistan 5 (Hashemi 45+2, Taher 51, Amani pen 55, Hatifi 78, Shayesteh 89)
Sri Lanka 0
HT: 1-0

Final
Jan 3
India 2 (Lalpekhlua 72, Chhetri 101)
Afghanistan 1 (Z Amiri 70)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 1-1. **Ref:** Kimura (Jap)
India: Singh Sandhu - Kotal, Mondal (Khongjee 117), Fernandes, Das, Borges, Jairu (Pradhan 120), Lyngdoh (Halder 96), Narzary, Lalpekhlua, Chhetri.
Afghanistan: Azizi - Amin, Saighani, Hashemi, Hadid, Alikhil, N Amiri (Popalzay 84), Zazai (Amani 91), Taher, Z Amiri (Hatifi 106), Shayesteh.

Previous winners

1993	India
1995	Sri Lanka
1997	India
1999	India
2003	Bangladesh
2005	India
2008	Maldives
2009	India
2011	India
2013	Afghanistan

CENTENNIAL COPA AMERICA

Qualifiers
Jan 8 - Panama City, Panama
Trinidad & Tobago 0
Haiti 1 (Belfort 86)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gantar (Can)
Trinidad & Tobago: J-M Williams - Cyrus, Abu Bakr, C Mitchell, M Williams, K George (Hackshaw 81), Boucaud, Peltier, Hyland, J Jones, Glenn (S Winchester 57).
Haiti: Ceus - Jerome, Lafrance (Thuriere 52), Bertin, Lambese, Alexandre, Hilaire, Mustivar (Millien 56), Christian, Belfort, Maurice (Aveska 89).

Jan 8 - Panama City
Panama 4 (Gomez 4, Tejada pen 18, Cooper 51, B Perez 89)
Cuba 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Guerrero (Mex)
Panama: Penedo - L Henriquez, Machado, Cummings, Davis, Pimentel (Cooper 46), Gomez, Godoy, Quintero (Barcenas 80), B Perez, Tejada (Arroyo 68).
Cuba: Sanchez - Vaquero, Piedra, A Martinez, Urgelles (A Cervantes 57), Clavelo (Napoles 76), Francisco, Gomez (Collado 65), A Hernandez, Luis, M Reyes.

● *The winners have qualified for the finals*

Finals
To be played June 3-26, 2016 in the United States

The 16 competing countries

Argentina	**Bolivia**
Brazil	**Chile**
Colombia	**Costa Rica**
Ecuador	**Haiti**
Jamaica	**Mexico**
Panama	**Paraguay**
Peru	**United States**
Uruguay	**Venezuela**

● *The teams will be drawn in 4 groups of 4 (draw scheduled for February), with the top 2 from each group qualifying for the quarter-finals*

FRIENDLIES

Tuesday, December 15
Dec15 - Liberia (Costa Rica)
Costa Rica 1 (Waston 58)
Nicaragua 0
HT: 0-0

Wednesday, December 16
Dec16 - Juticalpa
Honduras 2 (Elis 6, 55)
Cuba 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Hnd)
Honduras: Escober - Alvarez, Johnny Palacios (Velasquez 78), M Figueroa, Alvarado, Acosta (Flores 68), Morazan, Mendez, O Garcia (C Mejia 46), Elis (Puerto 85), Quioto (Rochez 66).
Cuba: D Guerra - Dranguet, Francisco, Piedra, Vaquero, Clavelo, Gomez (Saname 81), Luis, Napoles, Martell (Puga 65), Zuasnabar (Collado 83).

Thursday, December 17
Dec17 - Dhaka
Bangladesh 1 (Rony 18)
Nepal 0
HT: 1-0

Saturday, December 26
Dec 26 - Le Lamentin
Martinique 2 (Dondon 45, Abaul 50)
Guadeloupe 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Martial (Mar)
Sent off: Jerome (Guadeloupe) 63

Wednesday, January 6
Jan 6 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Sweden 1 (Ishak 70)
Estonia 1 (Prosa 56)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Alaleeli (UAE)
Sweden: Johnsson - Tinnerholm (Salomonsson 46), Holmen, Bergstrom (Wahlqvist 83), Lundqvist (Konate 46), Rohden (Barkroth 46), Fransson (S Eriksson 55), G Svensson (Hallberg 61), Claesson (Mrabti 46; J Nilsson 70), Kujovic (Ishak 46), Nyman (Engvall 46).
Estonia: Londak - Teniste (Jurgenson 46), Baranov, Mets, Pikk, Antonov (Avilov 75), Raudsepp, Gussev (Ojamaa 77), Puri (Frolov 46), Kait (Sappinen 46), Subbotin (Prosa 46).

Sunday, January 10
Jan10 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Sweden 3 (Salomonsson pen 45+1, Hallberg 46, Kujovic 59)
Finland 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Al Zaabi (UAE)
Sweden: Carlgren (Rinne 62) - Salomonsson (Tinnerholm 46), Bergstrom, Holmen (Wahlqvist 62), Konate (Lundqvist 46), Barkroth (Hallberg 46), Rohden, G Svensson (S Eriksson 46), Claesson (Fransson 62), Ishak (Nyman 62), Engvall (Kujovic 46).
Finland: Hilander - Raitala, Heikkila, Patronen (Hurme 46), Jalasto (O'Shaughnessy 86), Forsell (Pirinen 46), Schuller (Tahvanainen 72), M Hetemaj (Laaksonen 46), Pelvas (Saksela 46), Roope Riski (Skrabb 72), Pukki (Kokko 63).

Wednesday, January 13
Jan13 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Finland 0
Iceland 1 (Traustason 17)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Naqbi (UAE)
Finland: H Moisander - Heikkila (Patronen 61), Schuller (Hradecky 61), M Hetemaj (Laaksonen 46), Pukki, Arkivuo (Forsell 76), Pirinen, O'Shaughnessy, Pelvas (Roope Riski 46), Saksela, Raitala (Tahvanainen 46).
Iceland: I Jonsson (Bjornsson 46) - Hauksson, Ottesen, R Sigurdsson (Sverrisson 46), R Sigurjonsson (Omarsson 70), Traustason (Eyjolfsson 46), Valgardsson, T Bjarnason, Gunnlaugsson (Finnbogason 76), Kjartansson (Vilhjalmsson 46), Gudjohnsen.

Saturday, January 16
Jan16 - Dubai
United Arab Emirates 2 (Al Hammadi 25, Mabkhout 49)
Iceland 1 (Kjartansson 14)
HT: 1-1
United Arab Emirates: Naser - Fawzi, M Ahmed, Salem (Al Kamali 46), Fayez, O Abdulrahman, Esmaeel, A Abdulrahman (Omar 84), Al Hammadi (Abbas 46), Khalil (Hassan 46), Mabkhout.
Iceland: I Jonsson - Johannesson (Hauksson 71), R Sigurdsson, Arnason, K Jonsson, Omarsson (T Bjarnason 78), R Sigurjonsson, Palsson (Sverrisson 46), Traustason (Valdimarsson 60), Gudjohnsen (Vilhjalmsson 60), Kjartansson (Finnbogason 71).

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

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World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

MAY 16, 1979, BASLE, SWITZERLAND: EUROPEAN CUP-WINNERS CUP FINAL

Barcelona 4 Fortuna Dusseldorf 3

Barca win the first of their record-breaking four Cup-winners Cups

All square...Fortuna's Klaus Allofs (top right) turns away after equalising

This seven-goal showdown at St Jakob Stadium "produced 100 times the entertainment expected" according to the June 1979 edition of *World Soccer*. The report also said it was "a spectacle of drama and enthralling competitiveness for the 58,000 fans and millions of television spectators all over Europe".

The report continued: "In the end, it all came down to the massive contrast between the two men wearing the number three jerseys. In the white corner, Gerd Zewe, all skill, poise, adventure, fluidity and attacking extravagance from his role as sweeper. In the blue (and red) corner, Migueli, nicknamed 'Tarzan', a towering presence in the air, a granite cliff in the tackle, first a sweeper, then a stopper."

But although he was regarded as the best sweeper in German football at the time, Zewe was at fault for three of Barcelona's goals and also gave away a penalty that Carles Rexach missed.

Meanwhile, Migueli and Juan Manuel Asensi were the cogs that ran the Barca machine, with the report adding: "Asensi had enjoyed a most purposeful first half, scheming virtually every Barcelona attack."

Fortuna managed to subdue Asensi in the second half by man-marking him. But when Enrique Costas went off injured, Barca boss Joaquim Rife moved Migueli to stopper and dropped Asensi to sweeper.

"The switch had important consequences," concluded the report.

"Asensi regained a little of the freedom he needed to probe and prod, and in midfield Barcelona added the fresh legs of [Francisco] Martinez to aid the running of [Tente] Sanchez and dynamism of Neeskens at a time when the Germans believed their pace would pay off.

"Instead the game slipped back into Spanish hands and there, just about, it stayed." WS

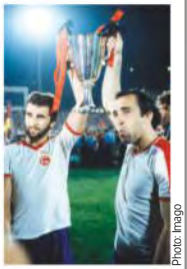

Photo: Imago

Winners...Hans Krankl (left) and Juan Manuel Asensi with the cup

Referee: Palotai (Hun)

KEY MOMENTS

Photo: Imago

Opener...Tente Sanchez puts Barca in front

5min Tente Sanchez runs on to a pass from Carles Rexach and lifts the ball over Fortuna goalkeeper Jorg Daniel. **1-0**

8min Pedro Artola parries Rudi Bommer's shot and, following a goalmouth scramble, Klaus Allofs bundles the ball over the line. **1-1**

12min Francisco Carrasco is fouled in the area by Gerd Zewe but Daniel saves Rexach's tame penalty.

35min Daniel keeps out Carrasco's shot but Juan Manuel Asensi scores from a few yards out. **2-1**

40min Wolfgang Seel gets on the end of a 40-yard pass from Gerd Zimmermann to level the scores. **2-2**

Photo: Imago

Finish...Hans Krankl scores Barca's fourth

103min Zewe slips in Dusseldorf's penalty area and deflect's Rexach's shot past Daniel. **3-2**

110min Zewe allows Hans Krankl too much space and the Austrian meets a cross from Carrasco to extend the lead. **4-2**

113min Bommer's shot is blocked by Francisco Martinez, but Seel is following up and tucks away the rebound. **4-3**

NEXT MONTH MARCH ISSUE ON SALE FEBRUARY 26

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